

WARREN W.
WIERSEBE

With
the
Word

A DEVOTIONAL
COMMENTARY

With the Word

**WARREN W.
WIERSBE**

Warren Wiersbe firmly believes that Bible knowledge by itself *is not spiritual nutrition*. Christians need much more than just knowledge to continue to grow in the Lord. For this reason, Wiersbe encourages you to take a devotional approach to Bible study.

When you read the Bible devotionally, according to Wiersbe, you are able to focus on the spiritual essentials, not simply the isolated historical or geographical accidentals.

Because it is not always easy to discover what these spiritual essentials are, Wiersbe shares from his vast storehouse of knowledge and years of personal study of God's Word in this unique devotional commentary.



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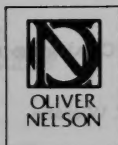


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Warren W. Wiersbe

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Getting the Most Out of This Book

W*ith the Word* is designed to be a supplement to your Bible and not a substitute for it. Its main purpose is to assist you in discovering and applying some of the basic spiritual lessons found in Scripture. Where needed, explanations of difficult texts are given, but this is not an “explanatory commentary” as such.

The Bible is God’s truth (John 17:17), and that truth is given on several “levels.” The foundation is *historical truth*, the record of facts and words that involve real people and real events. From these facts we learn *doctrinal truth* concerning God, man, sin, salvation, and a host of other subjects. Of course, the end result must be *practical truth*, for we get God’s blessing by *doing* His Word and not simply by *learning* it (James 1:22–25). Learning must lead to living.

The Bible was written for the heart as well as for the mind and the will, which is where *devotional truth* comes in. We use the Bible devotionally when we allow it to speak to us personally as we are taught by the Spirit of God (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13–15). All Scripture was not written *to* us, but it was written *for* us (2 Tim. 3:16–17); and it can enlighten, enable, enrich, and encourage us if we will only let it.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the famous British preacher, said, “No Scripture is of private interpretation: no text has spent itself upon the person who first received it. God’s comforts are like wells, which no one man or set of men can drain dry, however mightily may be their thirst.”

When we read the Bible devotionally, we focus on the spiritual essentials, not the historical or geographical accidentals. God has often encouraged me from the first chapter of Joshua, but this does not mean I can walk into the Jordan River and expect it to open up before me. However, I have seen

Him “open up” difficult situations in ministry as I have trusted Him.

The Word of God is given to warn us (1 Cor. 10:1–12) and to offer hope to us (Rom. 15:4). It can do these things for us only if we receive the Word personally and let it work in our lives (1 Thess. 2:13).

Christian biography is filled with examples of God’s “speaking” to His servants from the Word and giving them just the truth they needed for making hard decisions or facing difficult challenges. My wife and I have experienced this in our ministry. God has revealed His mind to us at just the right time through a portion of Scripture that was a part of our regular daily reading. People who “just open the Bible anywhere” and ask for help are turning God’s Word into a magic book and are tempting God, not trusting Him.

A word of caution here: we must be very careful of saying, “God told me to do this.” God does not address us today as He did Moses and Joshua and Paul. It is far better to say, “This is what the Spirit revealed to me from the Word, and I’m praying about what God wants me to do.” After all, Satan also knows how to use the Bible (Matt. 4:5–7). “It is written” must be balanced by “*Again* it is written.”

If you want to get the most out of this book, I suggest that you do the following:

1. Have a program for reading the Bible, a definite time and place and a schedule to follow. Random Bible reading is better than no reading at all, but it is rarely edifying.

2. Read the passage carefully, asking the Spirit to instruct you. Meditate on it, and seek the truths God has for you. You may want to write down in a devotional journal what you discover in the Word.

3. Read the comments in *With the Word*, think about them, and assimilate whatever truths God impresses on your heart. Trace the cross-references; compare Scripture with Scripture, and see how one passage sheds light on another.

4. Pray the truth into your inner being, and ask the Spirit to help you put it into practice. True Bible knowledge, properly assimilated, will lead to a “burning heart” that wants to obey (Luke 24:32) and not to a “big head” that wants to show off (1 Cor. 8:1).

To benefit from this book, you do not have to agree with everything I have written. My comments on the Word are not the meal; they are the menu that describes the meal. They are not the road but signal lights that help point the way. If this book ever takes the place of your Bible, or of your own meditation on the Bible, you will cease to grow. Bible knowledge alone is not spiritual nutrition.

I have been reading the Bible faithfully ever since I became a Christian in 1945. Many comments in this book have come from material that I wrote in notebooks I have kept for the past twenty years. When my good friend and editor, Dr. Victor Oliver, suggested that I write a devotional commentary, I had the opportunity to examine those notebooks again and "mine" from them the truths that I thought would help fellow pilgrims on the path of life. At least they have helped me, and for this, I am grateful to the Lord.

WARREN W. WIERSBE

THE PENTATEUCH

P*entateuch* means “five books” in Greek and is the title for the first five books of the Bible, all written by Moses. These five books tell the history of the nation of Israel: its beginnings in the call of Abraham and the birth of Jacob’s twelve sons (Genesis); its birth as a nation at Sinai (Exodus); its walk as a separated people (Exodus; Leviticus); its unbelief and disobedience (Numbers); and its preparation for conquering the Promised Land (Deuteronomy).

From Israel’s experiences, Christians today can learn about God and the life of faith (1 Cor. 10:1–13). The nation’s history presents both encouragement and warning, and we need both (Rom. 15:4). A knowledge of the Pentateuch provides a foundation for understanding the whole Bible. The God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses is our God, and we can trust Him to do what He promises to do.

GENESIS

Genesis is a book of *beginnings*: creation (chap. 1); human history, including marriage (chap. 2); sin and death (chap. 3); the promise of the Redeemer (3:15); human civilization (4:16ff.); Babylon (chap. 11); and the Jewish nation (chap. 12). Things that start in Genesis are carried through the Bible narrative and are fulfilled in the book of Revelation.

It is a book of *begetting*, describing the family tree from Adam to the founding of the nation of Israel. Ten different genealogies are recorded in Genesis. The account focuses on six persons and their families: Adam (chaps. 1–5); Noah (chaps. 6–10); Abraham (chaps. 11:1–25:18); Isaac (chaps. 25:19–27:46); Jacob (chaps. 28–36); and Joseph (chaps. 37–50). These genealogies may be boring to us, but they are important for tracing the Redeemer's ancestry.

It is a book of *believing*. Noah believed God and built an ark. Abraham believed God and left home for the Promised Land. Abraham and Sarah believed God, and He gave them a son. God gave His promises and then acted on behalf of those who trusted Him, just as He does today. (See Heb. 11:1–22.)

It is a book of *becoming*. God patiently worked with His people to make them what He wanted them to be. They failed Him often, but God did not give up on them. He is still the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and He can accomplish in your life all that He has planned for you.

GENESIS 1

We are conscious every day of the visible world around us. We need to remember that this world speaks to us of God, His existence, His wisdom, and His power (Rom. 1:20; Ps. 19:1–3).

God creates. Everything begins with God and fulfills His

purposes for His glory (Col. 1:16–17; Rev. 4:11). He works by the power of His Word (Ps. 33:6–9), the same Word that can work in our lives (1 Thess. 2:13). He works according to a plan: first He forms, then He fills. He formed the earth and filled it with plants and animals. He formed the firmament and filled it with stars and planets. He formed the seas and filled them with living creatures. He can form and fill our lives today if we will yield to Him. Persons who have trusted Jesus Christ are a part of the new creation (2 Cor. 4:6; 5:17; Eph. 2:8–10).

God names. He named what He made, and we have no right to make changes: “Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness” (Isa. 5:20). God calls things by their right names; if we use His vocabulary, we must also use His dictionary. (See Prov. 17:15.)

God divides. He separated the light from the darkness, the dry land from the waters, and the waters above from the waters beneath. This principle of separation is basic in all the Bible: He separated Abraham from Ur, the nation of Israel from the Gentiles, His church from the world (John 17:14–16). He wants His people today to be separated from all that defiles (2 Cor. 6:14–7:1).

God blesses. The first man and woman were the only part of creation especially blessed by God. Because we are created in the image of God, we are different from the other creatures God has made, and we must be careful how we treat one another (Gen. 9:6; James 3:9). Sin has marred that divine image, but one day all true believers will bear the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29). The more we are like Christ, the more we will enjoy His blessing (2 Cor. 3:18).

GENESIS 2

Now we are given the details concerning the creation of man and woman and their place in God’s plan. The account does not contradict chapter 1; it complements it. We see the man involved in several activities.

Resting (1–3). God’s rest was the rest of completion, not the rest of exhaustion, for God never gets weary (Ps. 121:4). Adam must have rested also, fellowshiped with the Lord, and worshiped Him. The seventh day, the Sabbath, became a sign to Israel that they were God’s special people (Exod. 31:13–17). It

is also a symbol of the eternal rest God's people will have with Him (Heb. 4:9-11).

Working (4-15). Rest and work must be in balance. Human history involves three gardens: the Garden of Eden, where man took of the tree and sinned; the Garden of Gethsemane, where the Savior took the cup and went to the tree to die for our sins; and the "garden city" of glory where God will take all His children to live forever (Rev. 21-22).

Work is not a curse. God gave Adam the task of guarding the Garden and tilling it. It was a fulfilling ministry for him. Man and God must work together to produce the harvest. St. Augustine said, "Pray as though everything depended on God, and work as though everything depended on you."

Submitting (16-17). The Creator has the right to govern His creatures. Love sets limits for the good of man. God calls us to obey Him because we want to, not because we have to. He wants children, not machines. Note especially the word *freely* in verse 16.

Naming (18-25). Man's naming the animals was a part of his "dominion" as the head of creation (1:26-28). He lost this dominion because of sin (Ps. 8), but we have regained it through Christ (Heb. 2:5ff.).

Adam also named his mate; he called her "Woman." Later, he would call her "Eve." God established marriage to meet man's need for companionship (2:18) and to provide for the rearing of children (1:28). In addition it served as a picture of Christ and His church (Eph. 5:25-32). Adam gave of himself for his bride, and Jesus gave of Himself for His bride (John 19:31-37).

GENESIS 3

The voice of deception (1-6). Up to this point, God's word is the only word that has been at work, creating and commanding. Now another "word" enters the scene, the word of Satan, the deceiver. He is a serpent that deceives (2 Cor. 11:1-3), a liar, and a murderer (John 8:44). He questioned God's word and God's goodness (v. 1), denied God's warning (v. 4), and then substituted a lie for God's truth (v. 5). "You will be like God" is his master lie (Isa. 14:12-14; Rom. 1:21-25), and people still believe it.

Eve was deceived when she ate, but Adam was not; he sinned with his eyes wide open (1 Tim. 2:14). He would rather forfeit his dominion than be separated from his wife.

The voice of love (7–13). Guilt produces fear, and fear makes us want to run and hide. Ordinarily, Adam and Eve would have run to meet God, but they had become sinners (Rom. 3:10–12). Sinners cannot cover their sins by their own works, nor can they hide from God.

The Father sought the lost sinners, as Jesus did when He was on earth (Luke 19:10), and as the Holy Spirit does today through His people (Acts 8:29ff.). God wants to use *us* to call men and women to salvation (Acts 1:8).

Overcoming Temptation

God tests us to bring out the best in us, but Satan tempts us to bring out the worst in us (James 1:1–15). Satan “baites the hook” with what seems good, and we take the bait and end up doing something bad. We can overcome the tempter by having faith and putting on the armor God provides (Eph. 6:10–18), by using the Word of God, by praying, by trusting God for the way of escape (1 Cor. 10:13), and by depending on the power of the Spirit.

The voice of judgment (14, 16–19). God cursed the serpent and the ground, but He did not curse Adam and Eve. The consequences of man’s fall are all around us, and we suffer because of them. The ultimate judgment is death. Man can overcome a difficult environment to some extent, but he can do nothing about “the last enemy,” death (1 Cor. 15:26). His only victory over death is through faith in Jesus Christ (John 11:25–26; 1 Cor. 15:57–58).

The voice of grace (15, 20–24). In verse 15, God declared war on Satan and gave the first promise of the Redeemer. Satan

would bruise Christ's heel, but Christ would bruise Satan's head and defeat him (John 12:31; Col. 2:15).

Adam believed the promise that his wife would bear children, and his faith saved him. He called her *Eve*, which means "life-giver." In response to their faith, God shed innocent blood and clothed them. The only way sinners can be saved is by faith in the shed blood of Christ (Heb. 9:22; see also Isa. 61:10; Eph. 2:8-9).

Jesus Christ is "the last Adam" (1 Cor. 15:45-49). The first Adam's disobedience plunged us into sin, but the Last Adam's obedience brought salvation (Rom. 5:12-21). The first Adam was a thief and was cast out of Paradise. The Last Adam told a thief he would enter paradise (Luke 23:43). In Adam we die; in Christ we have eternal life.

GENESIS 4

Satan is a serpent that deceives and a lion that devours (1 Pet. 5:8-9). He used Eve to tempt Adam and Cain to destroy Abel. The two "seeds" of Genesis 3:15 came into conflict, for Cain was a child of the devil (1 John 3:10-12), while Abel was a child of God (Matt. 23:35). Like his father, the devil, Cain was a liar and a murderer (John 8:44).

The marks of God's children are faith, hope, and love (1 Cor. 13:13; 1 Thess. 1:3-4). The marks of the devil's seed are unbelief, despair, and hatred, and they are evident in Cain.

Unbelief (1-7). When God killed animals and clothed Adam and Eve (3:21), He taught the significance of blood sacrifice (Heb. 9:22). Cain brought the wrong sacrifice in his hands and had the wrong attitude in his heart. His was not a sacrifice of faith, and God rejected it. God also warned Cain that sin was lying at his door, waiting to pounce on him.

Hatred (8). Cain's anger slowly became envy and hatred, and then it led to murder (Matt. 5:21-26). When you start to play with temptation, you will soon be caught (James 1:13-16). Cain was guilty of every sin that God hates (Prov. 6:16-19).

Despair (9-24). God's question to Adam and Eve was, "Where are you?" His question to Cain was, "Where is Abel your brother?" Do we know where our brothers and sisters are? Do we care? Or are we making excuses, as Cain did?

Now God curses a man! But Cain was not convicted about

his sin; he was concerned only about his punishment. Cain's unbelief, hatred, and deceit destroyed every relationship in his life: his relationship with his brother, God, himself, and the world around him. All of us are pilgrims on this earth, but Cain became a fugitive, a wanderer. "Thou hast made us for Thyself," said St. Augustine, "and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee."

Hope (25–26). Cain tried to compensate for his despair by building a "civilization" in the land of Nod ("wandering"). Since Adam and Eve had many children, Cain must have married a relative. He had many fine things in his city, but God rejected the whole thing and gave Adam another son, Seth ("appointed"), to carry on the godly line.

♦

Controlling Anger

We may have righteous anger against sin (Mark 3:5; Eph. 4:26), but too often our anger is itself sinful. Jesus warned that anger could be the first step toward murder (Matt. 5:21–26). We must ask the Holy Spirit to help us control anger (Prov. 15:18; 16:32), manifest love to those who offend us (Matt. 5:43–48), and learn to practice forgiveness (Eph. 4:26–32).

♦

GENESIS 5

The Old Testament is "the book of the genealogy of Adam" (v. 1). It tells us about Adam's descendants, and the story is not a happy one. In fact, the Old Testament closes with "lest I come and strike the earth with a curse" (Mal. 4:6).

The New Testament is "the book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ" (Matt. 1:1); before it ends, it declares, "And there shall be no more curse" (Rev. 22:3). The first Adam brought the curse; the Last Adam bore the curse (Gal. 3:13). Adam's sin caused thorns to grow (Gen. 3:18), but Jesus wore those thorns as a crown (Matt. 27:29).

God made man in His likeness, but sinful man now begets children in his likeness (v. 3). We are all born sinners (Ps. 51:5). But when a sinner is born again through faith in Christ, he or she begins to grow into the likeness of the Last Adam (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18).

Eight times in chapter 5 you find the sobering phrase “and he died.” Death is an appointment, not an accident. Because sin was reigning, death was also reigning (Rom. 5:14, 17), but in the life of Enoch, *God’s grace was reigning* (Rom. 5:20–21). He believed God (Heb. 11:5–6), walked with God in the midst of a godless society, and witnessed for God (Jude 14–15). Enoch did not die; God raptured him away to heaven. This is the “blessed hope” of all Christians (Titus 2:11–14; see also 1 Thess. 4:13–18).

Noah means “rest.” Mankind was in misery and longed for the promised Redeemer to come. He *has* come, and we can come to Him and find true rest (Matt. 11:28–30).

GENESIS 6—8

The account of a flood is written into the history of many ancient peoples, and the results of a flood are seen in many places on the earth. Jesus believed in the Flood (Matt. 24:37–39), and so did Peter (1 Pet. 3:20) and the author of Hebrews (11:7).

The holiness of God (6:1–7). God saw a world of people who were inwardly corrupt, outwardly violent, and upwardly rebellious. Noah was the tenth generation from Adam. It didn’t take long for sin to spread in the human race. When the world is again as it was in Noah’s day, watch for the return of the Lord (Matt. 24:37–39).

The grace of God (6:8–7:10). Noah was saved just as any sinner is saved, by grace (Gen. 6:8), through faith (Heb. 11:7). (See Eph. 2:8–9.) He heard God’s Word, believed God’s promise of protection, and proved his faith by his works. There was only one way to be saved from destruction, and that was by entering the ark; and the ark had only one door. It is a picture of the salvation we have in Christ.

The wrath of God (7:11–24). God was very patient and gave the world at least 120 years of opportunity to be saved (Gen. 6:3; 1 Pet. 3:20; 2 Pet. 2:5). The world refused Noah’s witness

and rejected God's grace up to the very day Noah and his family went into the ark. God waited another week (how the neighbors must have laughed at Noah!), but then the judgment came. As David proclaimed, "The LORD sat enthroned at the Flood" (Ps. 29:10). He is sovereign in all things! The next worldwide judgment will be with fire, not water (2 Pet. 3:1-12).

The faithfulness of God (8:1-22). Noah had faith in God's promises, and God did not disappoint him. (See 1 Kings 8:56.) True faith does not get in a hurry (Isa. 28:16); Noah waited until the word of God told him what to do. The first thing Noah and his family did on the cleansed earth was to worship the God who had faithfully cared for them (Ps. 116:12-19; Rom. 12:1-2). God gave them a covenant that assured them of the continuity of creation despite man's evil heart. This covenant makes possible the sustaining of life on earth. God has been faithful to His covenant, but man has not been faithful in his stewardship of the earth. (See Rev. 11:18.)

Faithfulness to God

Noah and his family were the only believers on earth, yet they witnessed courageously for God and against the evil of their day. They were faithful to God when everything seemed to be against them. God still calls His people to stand alone if needs be, and He promises never to forsake us (Heb. 13:5-6). God will judge us not on the basis of our popularity but on our faithfulness to Him (1 Cor. 4:2). God needs courageous witnesses today.

GENESIS 9

Government (1-7). God gave some new rules for life on the cleansed earth. He always guides His redeemed and shows

them His will. Noah and his family could now eat animal flesh (Gen. 1:29), *but they were forbidden to eat the blood* (Lev. 17:11–14). The sanctity of human life was affirmed in the ordaining of human government (Rom. 13). God established government because man is basically a sinner and must be kept under control. Murder is a terrible crime because man is made in the image of God, and to kill a human being is to attack God's image. All people are not children of God, but all belong to one human family because God made us of one blood (Acts 17:26).

Grace (8–17). God gave assurance that He would never send another flood to destroy life on the earth. The covenant included not only man but also birds, cattle, and the beasts of the field (Ezek. 1:10; Rev. 4:7). The sign of the covenant was the rainbow, a bridge of beauty that joins heaven and earth. Whether we look at the rainbow or not, *God* looks upon it and remembers His promises. Noah saw the rainbow *after* the storm; Ezekiel saw it *in the midst* of the storm (Ezek. 1:4ff.); and John saw it *before* the storm of judgment (Rev. 4:1–3).

Guilt (18–29). Imagine, a “preacher of righteousness” (2 Pet. 2:5), who was over six hundred years old, *getting drunk!* (See Gen. 6:5; 8:21; 1 Cor. 10:12.) Ham should have grieved over his father's sins, not gloated over them (Prov. 14:9). His brothers did what love always does: “covers all sins” (Prov. 10:12; 12:16; 17:9; 1 Pet. 4:8).

Noah's words must not be interpreted to mean that certain races are inferior and destined to be enslaved. In fact, history shows that some of Canaan's descendants were mighty nations with great empires. For that matter, even the Jews, the descendants of Shem, have had their share of captivity. His words were a prophecy: the sin of Ham would be visited on his son Canaan, who must have been involved in some way; Shem would have God's blessing (Rom. 9:1–5); Japheth (the Gentiles) would multiply and would worship the God of Shem. John wrote, “Salvation is of the Jews” (John 4:22). People who trust Christ for salvation are all one in Him (Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11).

GENESIS 10—11

From Noah's three sons, God made a new beginning in human history. He set apart Shem to be His special channel of

blessing, and it was through Shem that Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation, was born (11:10ff.).

Sin always separates: man from God (chap. 3); brother from brother (chap. 4); family from family (chap. 9); and now nation from nation.

Note the name of Nimrod (10:8-10). The phrase "mighty hunter" implies that he was a rebel against God and a tyrant against his fellowman. He founded two cities important in Bible history: Babylon and Nineveh.

Man seeks unity and notoriety, and he tries to accomplish these things by his own wisdom and strength. Lucifer wanted to be like God (Isa. 14:14), and man wanted to make a name for himself. But only God can make a person's name truly great (Gen. 12:2; Josh. 3:7).

Babel means "confusion," and "God is not the author of confusion" (1 Cor. 14:33; see also James 3:16). Babylon will appear often in the biblical record as the enemy of God's people. Wherever there is confusion, the spirit of Babylon—the world and the flesh—is at work. Ultimately, the whole "Babylonian system" will be destroyed (Rev. 17-18).

The confusion of tongues that began at Babel was reversed at Pentecost (Acts 2:7-8). A descendant of Ham, an Ethiopian, was saved in Acts 8; a descendant of Shem, Paul, was saved in Acts 9; and the gentile descendants of Japheth were saved in Acts 10. Unity is not worked up by man; it is sent down by God (Ps. 133; Eph. 4:1-6). As we share the gospel with others, we are helping to unite what sin has torn apart (Eph. 1:10-11). Christians are indeed the peacemakers of the world.

GENESIS 12

God's Word leads to faith (1-3). Abram was an idolater when God called him (Josh. 24:2), revealed His glory to him (Acts 7:2), and spoke to him. Abram turned from vain idols to walk with the Lord, and all of this was by God's grace. The hearing of the Word creates faith (John 5:24; Rom. 10:17). Again God's creative Word is at work.

Faith leads to obedience (4-6). The New Testament states, "By faith Abraham obeyed" (Heb. 11:8). "I will show you, I will make you, I will bless you!" were God's promises, and Abram believed. It has well been said that faith is not believing in

spite of evidence; it is obeying in spite of consequences. The proof of faith is obedience, for true faith always leads to works (James 2:14ff.). Hearing leads to heeding.

Obedience leads to blessing (7–9). We are told nothing about the journey, which must have been very difficult; but we are told that God met Abram when he arrived and gave him a new promise. God always goes before us and has His Word ready to encourage us. From now on, Abram's life will be marked by the presence of the *tent* (a pilgrim on earth) and the *altar* (a citizen of heaven).

Am I Living by Faith?

When you live by faith, you make your decisions on the basis of the Word of God (Rom. 10:17), and you seek to glorify God alone (Rom. 4:19–20). True faith is not in a hurry; it is willing to wait (Isa. 28:16; Heb. 6:12).

Faith obeys God in spite of circumstances or consequences, and it is not afraid of what others may say or do (Heb. 11:29–30).

Blessing leads to testing (10–20). Faith is always tested for at least three reasons: to prove whether our faith is real; to help our faith grow; and to bring glory to the Lord (1 Pet. 1:6–9; James 1:1–8). Imagine a famine in the very land where God led him! We can be in the will of God and still suffer trials. It has been said that “faith is living without scheming,” but Abram began to scheme. He was walking by sight and not by faith, and it cost him his testimony—and almost his wife! Note that Abram had neither a tent nor an altar in Egypt. “Going down to Egypt” is Bible language for getting out of the will of God.

God blessed Abram *that he might be a blessing*. Through Abram and his descendants, the whole world has been blessed. Whenever God gives you a blessing, it's so that you

might be a blessing to others. God's blessings are not luxuries; they are opportunities.

GENESIS 13

A new beginning (1-4). God chastened Abram in Egypt, and Abram returned to the land he never should have left. He was a very wealthy man, but his tent and altar were the most valuable things he possessed. When we fail, the Lord is ready to forgive and restore (1 John 1:5-2:2). "The victorious Christian life is a series of new beginnings," said Alexander Whyte.

A new burden (5-13). While in Egypt, Lot acquired wealth and a taste for the world, and his temporal interests were partly Abram's fault. God forgave Abram's sin, but He did not prevent the sad consequences. We reap what we sow, even after we are forgiven. Abram's first test of faith came from a famine; his second test came from his own family. Family tests are the hardest tests of all.

Abram was a peacemaker because he lived by faith; Lot was a troublemaker because he lived by sight. Abram chose a heavenly city (Heb. 11:13-16); Lot chose an earthly city, and a wicked one at that. The city appeared to be ideal, but it was headed for destruction. You can move your tent nearer and nearer to sin, *but you cannot take your altar with you*. Lot left God behind and destroyed his home.

A new blessing (14-18). The man of faith always receives a special word from God after a time of testing. Let others take what they want; our God gives us far more than they can ever imagine (Pss. 16:5; 33:12). Abram lifted up his eyes and saw the land. He lifted up his feet and claimed it by faith (Josh. 1:3). Then he lifted up his heart and worshiped God. Lot had broken Abram's heart, but God blessed Abram's heart—and made him a blessing.

GENESIS 14

Abram won three victories.

A victory over Lot. It would have been easy for Abram to let Lot suffer the sad consequences of his own foolish decision. But a man of faith is called "to be a blessing," so Abram went to the rescue. Lot was not a very dedicated believer, but he was

still a brother and needed help. When a brother or a sister creates problems for you, remember Abram and the words of Romans 12:21. Lot went right back into Sodom, but Abram did what he did for the Lord; and that's what really counts.

A victory over the kings. Abram the pilgrim would never have gotten involved in the war except to rescue Lot. Abram did not have a large army, but he battled by faith; that is what gave him the victory (1 Sam. 14:6; 1 John 5:4-5).

A victory over himself. "Let us be as watchful after the victory as before the battle," said Andrew Bonar. Abram was tempted to use God's victory for personal gain, but he refused the offer. The king of Sodom came with a bargain, but the king of Salem (a picture of our Lord Jesus Christ [Heb. 7:1-3]) came with a blessing. Even a shoelace from Sodom would have defiled Abram's godly walk! After every battle, give God the glory; and beware the devil's bargains. If you aren't careful, you may win the war and lose the victory.

GENESIS 15

Abram's reward was not the applause of the people he rescued but the approval of the God he served. This is the first of many "fear nots" in the Bible. Fear after a battle is not unusual, but fear and faith cannot live very long in the same heart (Matt. 8:26). Abram's fears were quieted by three revelations from God.

What God is (1). God is our protection and provision, so we need not fear the enemy without or our feelings within. God is the great I AM, and He can meet every need. With Him, we have everything; without Him, nothing we have is sufficient.

What God says (2-7). Abram looked at himself and realized how old he was getting. Then he looked at his steward, Eliezer, and thought perhaps God could use him. But God told him to stop looking at himself and at others and to start looking up to God. This is the second time he lifted up his eyes to see what God had for him (Gen. 13:14; see also 13:10). Verse 6 makes it clear that Abram was saved by faith in God's word (Rom. 4:3; Gal. 3:6; James 2:23), and that is the *only* way to be saved.

What God does (8-21). God sealed His promise with a covenant. In those days, to walk between the divided parts of an

animal was one way to seal an agreement. *But God was the only One who passed between the pieces!* Abram was asleep! God's covenants are all of grace (Eph. 2:8-9), and our works are but evidence of our faith.

When you find yourself afraid or impatient with God's will, look toward heaven and remember His covenant and His promises. When you bring your offering to God, be sure the enemy doesn't steal it. When you can do nothing, rest assured God is at work.

Fear

There is a godly fear, a reverence for the Lord, that must be in every heart (1 Pet. 1:17; 2:17). If we fear God, we need not fear anyone or anything else (Ps. 112; Isa. 8:13). The fear of man trips us up (Prov. 29:25), but if we fear God, we need not fear the words or threats of men (Matt. 10:26-33).

GENESIS 16

Faith and patience always go together (Heb. 6:12; James 1:1-5). Isaiah declared, "Whoever believes will not act hastily" (Isa. 28:16). We must trust God not only for His plan but also for His timing. Before He could send the promised son, God had to wait until Abram and Sarai were as good as dead (Rom. 4:19-21; Heb. 11:11-12). Sarai leaned on human understanding instead of God's promises (Prov. 3:5-6). She trusted a woman from Egypt instead of the God of heaven.

Sarai was not a strong *believer*, but she was a capable *blamer*. She blamed God for her barrenness, then blamed Abram when Hagar created problems in the home. The wisdom from God is pure and peaceable, but the wisdom of the flesh is always divisive (James 3:13-18). Abram abdicated his spiritual leadership in the home, and the result was confusion.

When we walk by sight and not by faith, we get impatient; we scheme and blame others. Then when things go wrong, we try to get rid of our mistakes. God sent Hagar and Ishmael back to Abram and Sarai, and they had to live with their mistake for at least another seventeen years.

Abram and Sarai greatly wronged Hagar, and they suffered for it; but God stepped in and cared for her and her son. Abram obeyed God and gave the appointed name to his son: "Ishmael—God shall hear." Had Abram and Sarai waited on God instead of running ahead of God, they would have avoided all that pain.

GENESIS 17

New revelations. As far as the record is concerned, God waited thirteen years before He revealed Himself again to Abram. During those quiet intervening years, Abram continued to walk with God and serve Him. He did not need constant special revelations to do God's will, nor do we. God reaffirmed His covenant and then gave Abram the sign of circumcision as the mark of that covenant. How unfortunate that many of the Jews trusted in the sign rather than in the Lord (Acts 15:5; Rom. 4:10; Gal. 5:6)! God wanted an inward change of the heart, not just surgery on the body (Deut. 10:16; Jer. 4:4).

New names. In Bible history, a new name means a new beginning, a step forward in faith. (See Gen. 32:28; John 1:40-42.) *Abram* means "exalted father"; it became *Abraham*, "father of a multitude." *Sarai* ("contentious") became *Sarah*, "a princess." God even revealed a new name for Himself: God Almighty. The only name that did not change was Ishmael, for what is born of the flesh remains flesh and cannot be changed (John 3:6).

New joy. At last, the long-awaited son would be born, and his name would be "Isaac—laughter." No wonder Abraham laughed (John 8:56). Abraham wanted to cling to his past mistake (v. 18) instead of looking to the future miracle that God would perform. Abraham and Sarah's impatient act of unbelief had brought sorrow and division into the home, but God's miracle of faith brought joy and peace (Rom. 15:13). It pays to trust God's way and wait for God's time.

God Almighty!

The Bible affirms our need to rely on God, for whom nothing is impossible (Luke 1:37): "Is anything too hard for the LORD?" (Gen. 18:14). "There is nothing too hard for You" (Jer. 32:17); God is "able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20). So, we may say, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13). Lay hold of God's power!

GENESIS 18

Resting (1). Resting in the afternoon is a normal practice in the East, and don't forget that Abraham was nearly a hundred years old. Sometimes the most spiritual thing we can do is take a nap! The believer's body is God's temple and must be cared for (1 Cor. 6:19–20). (See Mark 6:31.)

Serving (2–8). Abraham had no trouble noticing the pilgrims because it was unusual for people to travel in the heat of the day. The visitors were two angels and the Lord Jesus Christ, in one of His preincarnation appearances. Even though he had 318 servants, Abraham served Him personally, and fourteen times he called Him "Lord." Abraham ran from place to place to make certain the meal they were preparing was the very best.

Listening (9–15). Abraham stood nearby as the visitors ate, ready to serve them whatever they wanted. But the Lord gave Abraham something better than food: He announced that the promised son would be born within the year. "Where is Sarah your wife?" is the last of three key questions in Genesis (3:9; 4:9; 18:9). The question "Is anything too hard for the LORD?" has been answered by Job (Job 42:2), Jeremiah (Jer. 32:17), and Gabriel (Luke 1:37).

Interceding (16–33). Because Abraham was both the friend of God and the servant of God, he shared God’s secrets. (See Ps. 25:14; John 15:15; James 2:23.) Lot had been rescued by Abraham’s intervention (chap. 14); now he would be rescued by Abraham’s intercession. Abraham prayed for the city on the basis of the justice of God, but God saved Lot on the basis of His mercy and grace (19:16, 19). Interceding for the lost and for needy saints is a high and holy privilege that we must not neglect.

GENESIS 19

Because Jesus did not “feel at home” with Lot in Sodom, He sent the two angels to look into the situation for Him. The angels didn’t walk the streets or visit the public places of amusement. *They visited a professed believer to see what his home was like.* Lot’s wife and family were far from the Lord. The salt had lost its flavor (Matt. 5:13), so what hope was there for the city?

Abraham was visited when it was light, but Lot received the angels at evening (1 John 1:5–10). Abraham’s household obeyed his word as he served the Lord, but Lot’s family only laughed at Lot’s words. Abraham hastened, but Lot lingered and had to be dragged out of the city. Abraham, who lived outside Sodom, had more influence than Lot, who lived in the city.

Lot tried first to plead with the men at the door, and then to bargain with them. God’s approach was to judge them. They loved darkness rather than light (John 3:19).

God did not find ten righteous people, but He spared Lot and his wife and daughters for the sake of Abraham. While we may hate the sins of Sodom, keep in mind that all those people went to eternal judgment. (See Jude 23.)

Lot had no tent or altar, and he ended up in a cave committing terrible sins. Were it not for 2 Peter 2:7–8, we might doubt that he was a believer at all. (See Ps. 1:1.)

GENESIS 20

Relapse. The man of faith started walking by sight (v. 11), became frightened (Prov. 29:25), and began scheming (Gen.

12:10ff.). This time, even Sarah lied (v. 5)! Whatever we carry with us from the old life (v. 13) will create problems in the new life. It is one thing to *confess* our sins but another thing to *judge* them before God and forsake them (Prov. 28:13). When a marriage must be protected by a lie, the home is in danger.

Revelation. God spoke to the heathen king but not to His own friend, Abraham! Although God kept the king from sinning, He allowed Abraham to lie! God called Abraham to be a blessing, but now he had become a curse in the land. God was protecting Sarah, Isaac, and His great plan of salvation.

Rebuke. What a humiliating thing to be openly rebuked by a pagan king. God sometimes uses the unsaved to chasten the saved. The fact that Abraham was a believer did not give him license to sin. Unfortunately, years later, Abraham's son Isaac would imitate his father's sin (Gen. 26).

Restoration. In those days, the paying of a large sum of money was public "atonement" for guilt; however, sin is never profitable. God did not forsake His friend (Ps. 105:15; 2 Tim. 2:12-13) but honored him in the end and answered his prayer. Financially, Abraham was richer; spiritually, he was poorer. He lost character as well as opportunity to witness and glorify God.

GENESIS 21

Family joys (1-7). God kept His promises, followed His schedule, and did not fail. This time, Sarah's laughter was open and sincere, not hidden and skeptical (Gen. 18:12). The name *Isaac* means "laughter," and the boy brought much joy to the aged couple. Through him, joy has come to the world. God makes "everything beautiful in its time" (Eccles. 3:11).

Family sorrows (8-21). Abraham reaped the sad consequences of forgiven sin. He had lived with Ishmael for perhaps seventeen years, and he loved the lad, so the parting was painful. There comes a time when we must "cut off" the past and make a new beginning. The apostle Paul saw this as a picture of law and grace (Gal. 4:21-31). For Abraham's sake, God blessed the lad and made him a great nation.

Family testimony (22-34). Abraham's unsaved neighbors could tell that he was a man whom God had blessed. Abraham didn't try to lie his way out of this problem; he boldly told

the truth and trusted God to work. The possession of water is an important thing in the East, and people will fight over wells. God's people must be careful in their relationships with "those who are outside" the faith (Col. 4:5; 1 Thess. 4:12).

Life is a balance of joys and sorrows, problems and blessings. We must learn to accept what God gives us and walk by faith.

GENESIS 22

Offering Isaac on the altar was the hardest test Abraham ever faced, but he came through victoriously because he trusted God (Heb. 11:17–19). He had experienced resurrection power in his own body (Rom. 4:19–21), so he knew what God could do. It was a test of *faith*, far more difficult than the previous tests involving Lot and Ishmael.

It was also a test of *hope*, for God's plan of salvation for the world was wrapped up in Isaac. If Isaac died, how could the Jewish nation be built and the Savior be born? But Abraham had a living hope because he trusted in the living God (1 Pet. 1:3).

Certainly it was a test of *love*. In verse 2, you find the first use of the word *love* in the Bible. Abraham loved his son, but he loved God more. Isaac was God's gift to Abraham, but the gift had to become a sacrifice to God. If the gift becomes more important than the Giver, it becomes an idol.

After He tests us, God reveals Himself to us in a new way (John 14:21–23). The name *Jehovah-Yireh* means "the Lord will see to it" or "the Lord will provide." The ram was God's provision for Isaac, and Jesus Christ is God's provision for the whole world. In this experience, Abraham saw Christ by faith and rejoiced (John 8:56).

Why this "family news" in verses 20–24? To introduce us to Rebekah who will become the bride of Isaac (chap. 24). Isaac was a "living sacrifice" (Rom. 12:1–2), and God was working out His perfect will for him.

GENESIS 23

Abraham the mourner. Sarah is the only woman named in the Bible whose age is given and burial described. It was the

death of a princess, a woman of faith (Heb. 11:11–13; 1 Pet. 3:6). Abraham felt the pain of his loss and openly expressed his grief. Faith is not the enemy of tears, for we sorrow as those who have hope (1 Thess. 4:13–18). Jesus wept (John 11:35) even though He knew He would raise His friend from the dead.

Abraham the sojourner. Ephron did not plan to give Abraham a valuable piece of land, but that is how typical Eastern bargaining always begins. The land already belonged to Abraham (15:7), but he could never explain that to his unbelieving neighbors. He was a pilgrim and did not claim any of it for himself.

Abraham the owner. He paid a high price for what became one of the most famous tombs in Bible history, and eventually six people were buried there (49:31–32). Abraham owned only one thing on earth: a grave. Genesis ends with a full tomb, but the gospel story ends with an empty tomb! And because Jesus Christ lives, we who trust in Him never need fear death.

GENESIS 24

This is the longest chapter in Genesis, and it focuses on faith, hope, and love.

The father (1–9) loved his son and wanted a bride for him. He had faith that God would keep His promise (Gen. 12:2) and provide the bride. Note that the bride could not be an outsider (1 Cor. 7:39). Is this whole event not a picture of the heavenly Father getting a bride for His Son?

The servant (10–49) loved his master's son and asked for God's guidance. He knew how to "watch and pray" and discern God's leading. He was not disappointed, for God rewarded his faith. Little did Rebekah realize that a small act of kindness would open up an exciting new life for her. "Make every occasion a great occasion, for you can never tell when someone may be taking your measure for a larger place," advised Marsden. The servant talked about his master and not about himself, and he would not eat until he had given his message (John 4:31–32).

The bride (50–60) had nothing to go on but the treasures she saw and the words she heard from the servant. In spite of those who urged her to delay, she made a decision of faith and said, "I will go!" This is an illustration of personal salvation.

The Spirit speaks to us about Christ and shows us His treasures, and we trust Christ even though we have never seen Him (1 Pet. 1:8).

The bridegroom (61–67) was last seen on the mountain with his father (chap. 22), but now he comes to meet his bride at eventide. That is what Jesus Christ will do when He returns for His church. Then we shall see Him and be like Him (1 John 3:1–2).

GENESIS 25

The center of attention now shifts from Abraham to Isaac.

Isaac the heir. God's resurrection power continued to work in Abraham; he married again and begat six more sons. God is not likely to do this for people today, but the spiritual lesson is clear: we should be fruitful even in old age (Ps. 92:14). Abraham distinguished Isaac from his other sons: he gave them generous gifts, but he made Isaac his heir (v. 5; 24:35). God gives good things to unsaved people (Matt. 5:45; Acts 14:17; 17:25), but only those who are His children, through faith in Christ, can claim their inheritance. (See Rom. 8:17; Eph. 3:6; Heb. 1:2.)

Isaac the orphan. Abraham lived by faith and died by faith (Heb. 11:13), and God kept His word (Gen. 15:15). Isaac and Ishmael together mourned their father's death, for death is a human experience that binds all men together. Unsaved relatives share in times of sorrow, but their grief is hopeless without Jesus Christ. Compare Ishmael's death (v. 17) with that of Abraham.

Isaac the intercessor. Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah. For twenty years, they waited for a family that did not come. God blessed Isaac in everything but the thing he wanted most. He and Rebekah knew that God had promised descendants (Gen. 15:5), so Isaac laid hold of the promise and prayed. True prayer lays hold of God's Word (John 15:7) and seeks to accomplish God's purposes.

Isaac the father. God gave them twin boys who were opposite each other in every way. He also gave them a revelation that the younger one, Jacob, would carry on the messianic line. For that reason, you would think that Isaac would have favored Jacob, but the physical won over the spiritual. Esau

pictures the man of the world who despises the eternal and lives for the temporal.

GENESIS 26

Faith cannot grow apart from trials, and this chapter records several trials that Isaac endured and shows how he responded to them.

Escape (1–6). Like Abraham, Isaac started for Egypt (12:10ff.); but God stopped him at the border (10:19) and reassured him. Isaac was blessed because of Abraham (vv. 5, 24). We must never forget our debt to spiritual leaders (and relatives) who have gone before us.

Deception (7–14). While in enemy territory, Isaac resorted to the “family lie” that twice got Abraham into trouble (12:10ff.; 20:1ff.). It is sad when the new generation imitates the sins of the old generation. God blessed Isaac in a material way, but we wonder what his spiritual life was like. Did his neighbors trust him after hearing about his lie?

Surrender (15–25). Water is a very precious commodity in desert country, and possessing a well is almost the same as having a deed to the land. Instead of defending what his men had done, Isaac moved to new locations. He may have been practicing Romans 12:18.

Confrontation (26–35). In contrast to his father Abraham, who dared to declare war, Isaac was a quiet, meditative man who tried to avoid trouble. He boldly faced his neighbors with their bad conduct—and he won! Note that he went the extra mile and entertained the men at a feast. (See Rom. 12:18–21.)

GENESIS 27

A wrong decision. It was only a matter of time before the divided home would start to self-destruct, and it all began with Isaac. He knew that God had chosen Jacob, the younger son, to receive the blessing (Gen. 25:23–26); but he announced that he would give it to Esau. It seems that Isaac was more interested in his physical appetite than in spiritual things. He was not the spiritual person he once had been.

A wrong solution. Rebekah knew what God’s promise was

to Jacob, and she should have let God work it out in His own way. "Faith is living without scheming," and who can hinder the Lord from accomplishing His purposes (Dan. 4:35)? Instead, she made her son a liar and deceived her husband. If Isaac had trusted the Lord instead of his physical senses (vv. 21, 22, 25, 27), he would not have been fooled.

A wrong attitude. Esau had made it clear years before that he was not interested in spiritual things (Gen. 25:29-34), and certainly he knew God's word about the blessing. He wept (Heb. 12:17) and begged for a blessing, and then he plotted to kill his brother! His heart was not right with God or man. We are reminded of Cain (Gen. 4).

Rebekah's "a few days" (v. 44) became over twenty years! Despite all her scheming, she never saw her son on earth again.

GENESIS 28

A day of disappointment (1-9). Jacob was a lonely fugitive, forced to flee from home. Even though he left with his father's blessing (and Isaac knew what he was doing), Jacob faced an unknown future, and his brother still wanted to kill him. Not an encouraging beginning for a new chapter in his life! But God was still in control (Rom. 8:28).

A night of discovery (10-15). Jacob was literally between a rock and a hard place. But that night, Jacob made several discoveries that helped to change his life. He discovered that God was with him and working for him and had a perfect plan for his life. Jacob may have been separated from home, but he was not separated from heaven. (See John 1:51.) The very angels of God were caring for him (Heb. 1:13-14). "When the night is the darkest, you see the stars the brightest."

A morning of dedication (16-22). Jacob began his day worshiping God and turning his hard pillow into a holy altar. He gave the place a new name: "house of God." Wherever God meets us, that place becomes a holy sanctuary. Jacob's faith as yet was weak, but he did lay hold of God's promises, even if there is a bit of "the bargainer" in his vow to give God the tithe. Jacob was making a new beginning, and twenty years later he would return to Bethel a more mature believer.

GENESIS 29

Abraham's faithful servant had found a wife for Isaac, but Jacob had to find his own wife. God's plans are different for each of us, and we must accept His will (Phil. 2:12-13).

The guest (1-14). God's providence brought Jacob to the well just as Rachel was arriving. (See Gen. 24:27.) True to his scheming nature, Jacob tried to get rid of the shepherds so he could have her all to himself! It was love at first sight. That first month in Uncle Laban's home must have been heaven on earth to Jacob, but it didn't take long for things to change.

The worker (15-30). Jacob was not wealthy as Isaac was when he got his wife (Gen. 24:36, 53), so he had to work for his uncle to have the woman he loved. But love takes the burden out of work and makes time pass quickly. Jacob the schemer met his match in Laban and soon began to reap what he had sown. Jacob had deceived his father, and his father-in-law deceived him.

The father (31-35). The building of Jacob's family was vitally important to God's plan of salvation, for God would use the nation of Israel to give the world the Bible and the Redeemer. Although Rachel had great beauty, she was unable to conceive, while Leah gave birth to four sons: Reuben ("see, a son!"), Simeon ("hearing"), Levi ("joined"), and Judah ("praise"). The Lord was in control and had a special purpose for each son (Ps. 139:14-16; Eccles. 3:2).

GENESIS 30

There are two major themes in this chapter: the building of Jacob's family (vv. 1-24), and the building of Jacob's fortune (vv. 25-43). Various people (including Jacob) thought they were in control of the situation, but all of it was in the hands of God.

Having grown up his mother's favored son (25:28), Jacob was accustomed to a woman telling him what to do. But now he had *four* different women involved in his life! When he came home from the fields, he never knew which one he would be living with! The schemer discovered the pain that people feel when their lives are selfishly manipulated by others.

Rachel will have only two sons, Joseph and Benjamin, and Joseph will save the whole family from destruction.

Laban tried to trick Jacob and make him poor, but God overruled and made Jacob a very wealthy man. In fact, God even blessed Laban because of Jacob, and the old trickster admitted it (v. 27)! It was God's blessing and not Jacob's schemes that increased the flocks. God was keeping the promises He had made at Bethel (28:13-15). When we are in difficult situations, we can trust God to care for us.

GENESIS 31

Escape. The family situation was not at all comfortable for Jacob or his wives, but he patiently waited for God's instructions before making a move. The seeking heart will always get a word from God when decisions have to be made. Read Psalm 25 in the light of Jacob's situation. Like his mother before him, Jacob did a right thing in a wrong way, and God had to intervene to protect him (v. 24).

Encounter. Jacob had a three-day lead on Laban, but his father-in-law finally caught up with him. No one can successfully run away from problems. Laban accused Jacob of a breach of social custom, while Jacob accused Laban of breaking his promises for twenty years. There was also the matter of the household gods, for whoever had them could claim possession of Laban's property.

Expedience. The two men never did agree, and their problems were not solved. Instead, they declared a truce and made a pile of stones the boundary beyond which neither would pass. It was called "the heap of witness" to remind Jacob and Laban that God was watching both of them. (The word *Mizpah* means "watchtower.") The so-called Mizpah benediction is not a correct interpretation or application of this passage.

It is better to declare a truce than to wage a war, but the best decision of all is for brethren to "dwell together in unity" (Ps. 133:1). See Ephesians 4:25-32 for directions.

GENESIS 32

Jacob expected a battle and his concern was escape, not reconciliation (v. 8). He saw the army of angels protecting him,

but even that didn't encourage his faith. *Mahanaim* means "double camp"—his camp and the camp of God's angels. Had Jacob recalled his experience with God at Bethel, he would not have been afraid of Esau (28:13–15).

One minute Jacob prayed for God's help, and the next minute he devised some new way to appease his angry brother. He reminded God of His great promises and then acted as though God had never spoken. This is the conduct of a believer who needed to be broken before God. He prayed to be delivered from Esau (v. 11), but his greatest need was to be delivered from himself.

Jacob was broken to be healed and weakened to be strengthened. When he surrendered, he won and became a "prince with God." His limp would be a constant reminder that God would be in control of his life. "God fights *against* us with His left hand and *for* us with His right hand," wrote John Calvin. When we let God have His way, it is the dawning of a new day (v. 31).

GENESIS 33

Jacob had seen God and been given a new name, but the benefits of his experience didn't appear immediately. Sometimes he acted like Jacob ("the heel-catcher") and sometimes like Israel ("the prince with God"). Many of God's people fail to live up to their new life in Christ because they don't claim what they have by faith. God had to give Jacob a limp to encourage him to walk by faith.

In his attempt to appease Esau, the old schemer used several devices: bowing (vv. 1–7), bribery (vv. 8–11), outright lying (vv. 12–16), and then moving off in another direction (vv. 17–20). Esau went south and Jacob went east! Princes are not supposed to bow, and what about God's promise in Genesis 25:23 and 27:29?

One mistake often leads to another. Jacob ceased to be a pilgrim, purchased the land he was already given by God, built a house, and settled down. He built an altar and called on "God, the God of Israel" (note the new name); but that didn't prevent him from getting into trouble with the neighbors. Far better had he pressed on to Bethel.

GENESIS 34

Defilement. Lot pitched his tent toward Sodom and lost his daughters (19:30ff.), and Jacob moved too close to Shechem and lost Dinah. She was the daughter of Leah (30:21), which explains why Simeon and Levi became so angry (35:23). Had nobody warned her? Was she out looking for opportunities to sin? Or was she completely overpowered by the prince? It may have been love at first sight, but that didn't lessen the guilt or tragedy of the sin.

Deception. Note the twofold attempt at deception: Simeon and Levi deceived Hamor, and Hamor thought he deceived them. Jacob's sons had learned much from watching their father. Dinah's two brothers were preparing for war while the men of Shechem were preparing for wealth. When the men of the city were unable to fight, Simeon and Levi killed all the men and took the spoils. It was another case of promoting a holy cause in an unholy way and being motivated by hatred of the enemy instead of love for the truth.

Disgrace. Jacob was more concerned about his safety and his reputation than he was the character and conduct of his ruthless sons. Although Jacob was not to blame for their deed, had he not settled near Shechem, this tragedy would not have occurred. On his deathbed, Jacob brought the matter up again (49:5-7). How gracious of God to make the tribe of Levi the priestly tribe! (See Rom. 5:20.)

GENESIS 35—36

New beginnings. God once more appeared and told Jacob what to do. This was a part of the Bethel promise (28:13-15). We walk by faith when we obey God in spite of circumstances or consequences. But a change in geography does not guarantee a change in life, so Jacob told the whole family to bury the past and get rid of their heathen charms and idols. At Bethel, Jacob built a new altar and worshiped "the God of the house of God."

New sorrows. Three deaths are recorded in chapter 35, for death is one of the facts of life. Jacob's obedience to God did not prevent him for experiencing trials. He lost a friend,

Deborah; a favorite wife, Rachel; and then his beloved father. (In spite of what he said in 27:2, Isaac lived for forty-three years after that!) Perhaps the greatest sorrow of all was the sin of his firstborn son Reuben. Sin is expensive, and this one cost Reuben the birthright (49:3-4; 1 Chron. 5:1).

New joys. The birth of Benjamin cost Rachel her life (30:1). Jacob wisely changed the name from "son of my sorrow" to "son of my right hand" (the place of honor). It was an act of faith at a time when Jacob's heart was broken. Like Benjamin, our Lord Jesus is a Son of sorrow (Isa. 53:3) and a Son of the right hand (Ps. 110:1; Mark 16:19). The tribe of Benjamin gave us the apostle Paul (Phil. 3:5), so the mother's sacrifice bore a rich harvest for the whole world (John 12:24-25).

Since the family was complete, the sons and mothers were listed. Esau's family tree is much more imposing than Jacob's, but this is the last we hear of it. Despite their failures, the sons of Israel are the chosen instruments to accomplish God's will on earth.

GENESIS 37

As you read the life of Joseph, you see in him a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ. Joseph was greatly loved by his father (v. 3; Matt. 3:17), hated and envied by his brothers (John 15:25; Mark 15:10), plotted against, sold as a slave, arrested unjustly, and made to suffer. But he went from suffering to glory and became the savior of the people who had rejected him.

God's goal for all His children is that we become like His Son (Rom. 8:29). The goal is glorious, but the process is painful. Both Jesus and Joseph had to suffer before they could enter into their glory (Luke 24:26; 1 Pet. 5:10). Had Joseph remained at home, his father probably would have pampered him and ruined his character. God knew what was best.

Joseph's dreams were to him what God's Word is to us today: they gave him the assurance he needed when the going was hard.

Again, Jacob reaped what he had sown. He had killed a beast and lied to his father (27:9ff.), and his own sons lied to him.

GENESIS 38

Marrying a Canaanite woman was disobedience on Judah's part (24:3; 2 Cor. 6:14—7:1). When one gets away from the family of God, it is easy to fall into temptation and sin (Ps. 1:1). Two of his sons were slain by God, and then his wife died. What tragedy!

It was expected that the next son would marry the widow and thus preserve the family, but Judah probably did not intend to keep his promise (v. 11). Tamar's purpose was good, but her plan was wicked. Leaving the signet and staff was like leaving fingerprints, because each man's was distinctive. Judah was quick to condemn Tamar for sinning, but what about his own sins toward Joseph and Tamar?

Why is this sordid chapter in the Bible? For one thing, we see the contrast between Judah's sin and Joseph's victory (chap. 39), and we realize the importance of purity. But the main reason is to add another link in the Redeemer's family tree (v. 29; Ruth 4:18—22; Matt. 1:3). How gracious God is to mention a prostitute like Tamar in the genealogy of the Savior!

GENESIS 39—40

The key to Joseph's conduct was his godly character, and the basis for that character was his recognition that he belonged to God and served Him (39:9). "The LORD was with Joseph" is often repeated (39:2, 3, 21, 23).

The Lord is with us as we work, and we should do our work as unto Him (Eph. 6:5—8). He is with us when we are tempted and will show us the way to escape (1 Cor. 10:13). We must keep away from temptation (Rom. 13:14); and if it gets too close, we must run away (2 Tim. 2:22). It is better to flee and lose your garment than fall and lose your character.

God is with us as we wait. Joseph spent two difficult years working in the prison, but he held to his faith and did what he could to serve others. The experience helped to "put iron into his soul" (Ps. 105:17—22). If the Lord controls us, it makes little difference who commands us.

The fact that Joseph could interpret the dreams of the

baker and butler indicates that he understood the meaning of his own dreams. He knew that one day his eleven brothers would have to bow before him. What an encouragement that was to his faith!

GENESIS 41

Explanation. For two years, Joseph was forgotten by the chief butler, but he was not forgotten by the Lord. It is disappointing to depend on people, for often their help never comes (Pss. 60:11; 146:3). Speaking to the world's greatest ruler, Joseph was careful to give all the glory to God (vv. 16, 25, 28, 32).

Exaltation. God always exalts the humble "in due time" (1 Pet. 5:6). Joseph started as a servant, but then God made him a ruler (Matt. 25:21). He experienced suffering before God gave him glory (1 Pet. 5:10). God invested thirteen years in making a man out of Joseph; when it comes to building character, God is never in a hurry.

Expectation. Joseph's new name probably means "the one who furnishes nourishment to the land." He married an Egyptian wife, and she bore him two sons who were given significant names: Manasseh ("one who forgets") and Ephraim ("double fruit"). Joseph determined to forget the past and live for the future. In the Bible, *forgetting* means "not holding it against another." Joseph certainly did not forget what his brothers did, but he did not hold it against them. Instead, he concentrated on living a fruitful life to the glory of God.

GENESIS 42—44

These chapters describe Joseph's dealings with his brothers and the brothers' consequent confrontations with their father. The ten brothers had sinned against both Jacob and Joseph, but they thought that Joseph was dead and their sin was safely hidden. Joseph had to deal with them patiently, honestly, and decisively, just the way the Lord works with us when we have tried to cover our sins.

Joseph's immediate goal was to get all eleven brothers to Egypt so they could bow before him and fulfill the dream God had given him more than twenty years before. His ultimate goal was to get them to confess their sins and be reconciled to

him and Jacob. The men had to come to the place where their mouths were stopped (44:16; Rom. 3:19).

In a masterful way, Joseph wove these two purposes together as he spoke roughly to them, accused them of crimes, and insisted on their bringing Benjamin to Egypt. Outwardly, he was a stern ruler; but behind the scenes, he was a weeping brother.

Jacob's responses mirror our responses to God's providential disciplines: "Everything is against me!" (42:36); "Why didn't you do it differently?" (43:6); "Take a gift along" (43:11 [always the schemer!]); "If it has to be, it has to be!" (43:14). From pessimism to fatalism, and very little faith.

GENESIS 45

Recognition. When Joseph saw that his brothers' hearts were humble, and when he heard them confess their sins, he knew it was safe to reveal his identity to them. Had he done it earlier, they would not have been ready for the blessings he had for them; and had he waited longer, the men might have been in total despair. Our Lord knows just how to work in our lives to bring us to submission. Joseph could have fed them and their father without going through this lengthy procedure, but it would only have further ruined their character.

Reconciliation. Joseph said, "Please come near to me" (v. 4). He had forgiven them, but they were still afraid. In fact, they would still be afraid seventeen years later (50:15-21). In Jesus Christ, we have been reconciled to God, and we need not fear judgment (Rom. 8:1; 2 Cor. 5:18; Col. 1:20). God wants us to draw near to Him (Heb. 10:19-25; James 4:8).

Reassurance. Joseph explained to them that God had sent him before them to preserve the nation so that Israel could be a blessing to all the earth (12:1-3). God's providential purpose did not minimize their sins or negate their responsibility (Acts 2:23; 3:13-18), but it did help to ease their fear and sorrow. Joseph further reassured them by giving them rich gifts and promising to care for the whole family. The gifts he sent home helped to give Jacob the assurance he needed that Joseph indeed was alive.

Joseph knew his brothers, so he admonished them: "Don't be angry with yourselves!" (v. 5), and "Don't quarrel on the

journey!” (v. 24). We quickly lose the blessing when we fail to accept Christ’s forgiveness and then love one another. (See 1 John 4:7ff.)

GENESIS 46—47

It would not be easy for Jacob, now 130 years old, to leave the land God gave him and go to Egypt. Moving to a new home is usually a difficult experience, and the older we are, the more difficult it is. Furthermore, Abraham got into trouble in Egypt (12:10ff.), and God had stopped Isaac from going there (26:2ff.).

But Jacob was able to go with confidence and peace because he was sure of God’s promise and presence (46:1–4). In the crisis hours of life, God speaks to us and assures us when we take time to worship. Furthermore, Jacob knew that God had gone before him and that Joseph was there making everything ready for him. The future is your friend when Jesus is your Lord and you follow Him.

Jacob was a blessing in Egypt. He blessed Pharaoh (47:7, 10), Joseph and Joseph’s sons (48:15, 20), and all twelve of the sons of Israel (49:1ff.). God blesses us that we might be a blessing. Circumstances change, but God never changes.

Egypt was a haven for Jacob and his family, and there God protected them and built of them a great people. But Jacob knew that Egypt was not his home, Canaan was; and he wanted to be buried there with the others who had made the same pilgrimage of faith. He was a testimony in life, and he wanted to be a testimony in death. Despite his mistakes and failures in life, Jacob ended well.

GENESIS 48—49

What should believers do for their family before God takes them in death? Just what Jacob did.

He praised God for the past. He told his family what God had done for him and how God had blessed him. God had redeemed him and shepherded him all his life (48:15–16). Jacob had been in some hard places, but the “Stone of Israel” had been his refuge and defense (49:24). At the end of life, may we

be able to say, "Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD" (Ps. 34:11).

He gave a blessing while he could. Reuben's sin cost him the blessing of the firstborn, which went to Joseph's sons. (See Gen. 35:22; 1 Chron. 5:1-2.) Again, God changed the birth order as Jacob put Ephraim ahead of Manasseh. Joseph was disturbed by the move, but Jacob was right. We must never try to tell God how to bless other people. Note that Jacob crossed his arms. Is this perhaps a picture of the Cross that sets aside the first birth and gives us a second birth?

He warned about the future. Chapter 49 is not a father's blessing on his sons. Rather, it is a prophecy of what the sons could expect in the future because of their individual characters and the decisions they had made. Reuben was the lustful prodigal son, but Levi and Simeon were angry elder brothers. Judah would be the royal tribe, for the Messiah (Shiloh, "the peace-bringer") would come from Judah. Joseph was the vine that went over the wall separating Jews and Gentiles. He was shot at by his brethren, which often happens to those who are especially blessed of God. But the Lord was with him, strengthened him, and extended his boundaries of blessing (v. 26). Joseph suffered, and his sons were blessed by God. Reuben sinned, and his sons lost the blessing of God.

GENESIS 50

Three burials are mentioned in this final chapter of Genesis, and each is significant.

Burying a beloved father. It is instructive to contrast the simple Jewish funerals with the elaborate burial customs of the Egyptians. There is certainly nothing wrong with caring for the body and expressing grief, so long as we keep things in perspective. Jacob died in faith and was a pilgrim to the very end (Heb. 11:21). He started with his staff and ended with his staff (32:10; 1 Tim. 6:7).

Burying the past. Joseph's brothers did not really believe that Joseph had forgiven them, even though they had heard his words, seen his tears, felt his kisses, and received his gifts (45:1-15). Like the prodigal son, they offered to work their way into his favor (Luke 15:19). Their attitude grieved Joseph, who

had endured so much for them, just as we grieve our Lord when we doubt His forgiveness and love (Rom. 8:31-39).

Burying a devoted brother. Like his father, Joseph knew what he believed and where he belonged. If we consider all the difficulties he had experienced in life, it is remarkable that Joseph had any faith at all. He knew God's promise to Abraham that the nation would be delivered from Egypt (15:12-16), and he reiterated that promise to his family. Joseph had brought them to Egypt and cared for them in Egypt. His coffin reminded them that God would bring them out of Egypt. What an encouragement that was during the dark days of their bondage. Our encouragement today is not a coffin but an empty tomb (1 Pet. 1:3ff.).

EXODUS

Exodus means “going out.” The book has three main themes.

Liberation (1–18). This section describes Jehovah’s victory over the gods of Egypt and the deliverance of His people from bondage. The emphasis is on *the hand of God*. (See 3:20; 7:4–5; 9:3, 15; 13:3, 9, 14, 16.) The Exodus is a picture of the redemption we have through faith in Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God (John 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:7; 1 Pet. 1:18–21).

Separation (19–24). God and Israel entered into covenant relationship at Sinai. God gave them His law that they might be separated from the other nations and devoted wholly to Him. The emphasis is on *the holiness of God*. While God’s people today are not obligated to obey all these precepts, the basic principles are timeless and apply to holy living today.

Habitation (25–40). God had walked with His people in Genesis, but now He wanted to dwell with them. The emphasis is on *the house of God* and the priests who ministered there. The book of Hebrews in the New Testament explains how the tabernacle ministry foreshadowed the work of Jesus Christ and His present ministry in heaven as High Priest. Today, God’s people are His temple (1 Cor. 6:19–20; Eph. 2:20–22).

EXODUS 1

The nation growing. God promised that the descendants of Abraham would multiply greatly, and they did (Gen. 13:16; 15:5). God keeps His word and accomplishes His purposes in His time. Over the centuries, nations have tried to destroy Israel but have not succeeded. God gave Israel a special promise in Genesis 12:3, and He is keeping it. God’s children today should pray for Israel (Ps. 122:6), share the gospel with them

(Rom. 1:16), and minister to them in practical ways (Rom. 15:25-27).

The nation groaning. God told Abraham that his people would experience suffering (Gen. 15:13-14). It is easy for nations and local churches to forget the heroes of yesterday (Heb. 13:7-8). Although we must not “embalm” the past, we certainly must not forget those who helped to make our future possible.

The new Pharaoh was more concerned about national security than human decency. When people become a means to an end instead of an end in themselves, we are not treating them as God wants us to. Enslaving the men and killing the baby boys were Egypt’s solution to “the Jewish problem.”

The midwives believed in obeying God rather than men (Acts 5:29). Thank God for concerned people who will courageously defend the little ones! God rewarded the women, not by making them sterile (which would have been safer), but by *giving them families!* This shows how valuable children are in the sight of God (Ps. 127:3-5). Ponder the words of our Lord in Matthew 18:1-6.

Obeying God

Moses’ parents and the Jewish midwives are not the only ones in Bible history who had the courage to put God’s will ahead of man’s law. Daniel and his friends (Dan. 1), the three Hebrew men (Dan. 3), and the apostles (Acts 4:19-20; 5:29) are other examples. Their aim was not to oppose a bad law but to uphold the glory and truth of God.

EXODUS 2

Moses’ parents, Amram and Jochebed (Exod. 6:20), knew that the times were difficult, but they had faith to get married and have a family (Acts 7:20; Heb. 11:23). Aaron and Miriam

were already in the home when Moses was born. It was not easy to provide for another child, but God enabled them, as He still does parents today.

It also took faith for the parents to put their son into the river, obeying at least the spirit of the Egyptian law. God rewarded their faith. Jochebed not only got her son back, but she was paid to take care of him!

Moses had a splendid education (Acts 7:22), but he was lacking in faith. He fought the wrong enemy at the wrong time with the wrong weapon. When you start to look around and ask yourself "Is it safe?" and not "Is it right?" you have stopped living by faith. Sometimes God has to "set us aside" to teach us what we need to know—and to help us forget the way the world does things. Moses' impulsive deed sent him to the back of the desert for forty years, just as his impulsive words would keep him out of the Promised Land (Num. 20:9-13). An impatient spirit is a dangerous thing.

Impulsive People—Prov. 19:2

Moses	Exod. 2:11-14; Num. 20:9-13
David	1 Sam. 25:1-13
Elijah	1 Kings 19:1-3
Peter	John 18:10
Mary Magdalene	John 20:1-2

EXODUS 3

You never know what a day may bring, so keep your eyes and ears open to the leading of the Lord. Childlike curiosity completely changed Moses' life. God calls busy people to serve Him, and He reveals Himself to them.

God is faithful. He called Abraham, cared for Isaac, guided and protected Jacob, and He would be with Moses. He is the God of the individual as well as the nation, and He does not change from generation to generation.

God is concerned and compassionate. He saw the affliction of His people, and He heard their cries. Then why didn't He act sooner? Because He was following a perfect timetable (Gen. 15:13–16). You must learn to wait on the Lord. (See Ps. 37.)

God is long-suffering. The Lord answered all of Moses' objections and gave one assurance after another to encourage him. Moses said, "I am not!" and God replied, "I AM!" Faith lays hold of what God is and obeys what God says. Faith sees the opportunities while unbelief sees the obstacles. Are you arguing with God about something He wants you to do?

EXODUS 4

Forty years before, Moses was sure he could solve his people's problems; but now that God had called him, he was sure he would fail. He could give no reasons for disobeying God, but he certainly had plenty of excuses. "An excuse is the skin of a reason stuffed with a lie," observed Billy Sunday. But God gave Moses everything he needed for success. All he had to do was trust the great I AM.

Credentials. If we give God what we have, He can use it for His glory: a rod, a sling (1 Sam. 17:40), a net (Luke 5:1–11), or a little lunch (John 6:9). He can even use the hand if *nothing* is in it!

Companion. God already had Aaron prepared and on his way to meet Moses. While Aaron at times created some problems for Moses, he was still a valued helper in the work. He was the speaker, and Moses was the doer. But in time, Moses himself became a great orator.

Commission. God spoke to Moses and gave him the instructions and encouragement he needed (vv. 19–23). Before he arrived in Egypt, Moses knew that his work would be difficult and that Pharaoh would oppose him.

Chastening. Moses was chastened by God and almost died because he had failed to make his child a son of the covenant (Gen. 17:10). How could Moses lead Israel if his own family was not dedicated to God? (See 1 Tim. 3:5.)

Conviction. Moses was sure nobody would believe him; however, when the elders saw the signs and heard the message, they believed and bowed to worship God.

When you face a tough job and you are afraid that you will

fail, remember Moses. God keeps His promises, no matter how you feel or how people respond.

EXODUS 5—6

When Moses and Aaron began their work in Egypt, their first problem was with Pharaoh (5:1–9). Not only did Pharaoh refuse to let the people leave Egypt, but he made their work more difficult. That gave Moses a second problem—his own people, who blamed him for their plight (5:20–21). He had a foretaste of the criticism and rebellion he would experience for the next forty years. Often the people you help the most appreciate you the least.

Moses' third problem was with the Lord Himself (5:22–23)! God had promised success but Moses had failed. Even the Jews didn't believe him! Madame Guyon spoke of these kinds of difficulties: "In the commencement of the spiritual life, our hardest task is to bear with our neighbor; in its progress, with ourselves; and in its end, with God."

But God gave Moses the assurance that he needed (6:1–8) and told him to return to his job and stay with it. God doesn't solve every problem immediately, nor does He follow your schedule. When you think you have failed, even when you have obeyed God's will, ponder Isaiah 55:8–9 and Jeremiah 29:11.

EXODUS 7—8

If men will not obey His words of warning, God must speak by His works of judgment. When God speaks, people either obey and submit their hearts or disobey and harden their hearts (Heb. 3:7–13). From the human point of view, Pharaoh resisted God's will and thus hardened his own heart. From the divine point of view, God sent the judgments and therefore caused his heart to harden. The same sun that melts the ice also hardens the clay.

The court magicians were able to imitate Aaron's miracle. Satan is a counterfeiter, and that is one way he opposes God's work today (2 Tim. 3:8–9). Some miracles are lying wonders (2 Thess. 2:9–10). Be sure you can tell the difference (1 John 2:18–27; 4:1–6).

The plagues were God's declaration of war against the false gods of Egypt (12:12). He proclaimed, "I am the LORD" (7:5). They were also a declaration that God had put a difference between the Jews and the Egyptians (8:23).

How sad that Israel saw God's wonders in Egypt and yet did not trust Him (Ps. 106:6-7). They even wanted to return to Egypt after they had been delivered! Great experiences are no guarantee that one has grown spiritually. It all depends on what happens to your heart.

EXODUS 9—10

All Moses wanted was Pharaoh's permission to take the people on a three-days' journey to a place where they could worship God. God had put a difference between His people and the people of Egypt, just as today He has put a difference between the people of God and the people of the world (2 Cor. 6:14-18).

But the world doesn't want believers to be too radical, so it offers various compromises: "Sacrifice in the land" (8:25); "Don't go too far away" (8:28); "Don't take your children" (10:8-11); and "Don't take your possessions to serve God" (10:24-26). Have you been tempted by any of these compromises lately?

God's judgments had practically ruined the land, yet Pharaoh would not give in. In so doing, Pharaoh thought he was showing great strength; actually, God was using him to display His own sovereignty (9:16; see also Rom. 9:17-18). God is greater than any ruler, so we need never fear (Dan. 4:34-37).

Pharaoh's "confession of sin" (9:27) was not sincere; he only wanted Moses to stop the plagues. True repentance involves a change of mind that leads to a change of life. Balaam (Num. 22:34), Saul (1 Sam. 15:24), and Judas (Matt. 27:4) were all guilty of insincere confession of sin.

EXODUS 11—12

Life. "One more plague!" The words sounded ominous, and they were, for the last plague was death to the firstborn. When you trust in the Lord, it means the difference between light

and darkness (10:21-23) and life and death. God made this difference (11:7), and His people must maintain it (Rom. 12:1-2).

Lamb. Observe the sequence: “a lamb” (12:3), “the lamb” (12:4), “your lamb” (12:5). The Passover lamb is a picture of Jesus Christ who died for the sins of the world (John 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:6-7). Do you call Him “a Savior,” “the Savior,” or “my Savior” (Luke 1:47)?

Jesus is the perfect Lamb (1 Pet. 1:18-19) who had to die to save us. We are saved not by admiring His example or by studying His teaching, but by applying His blood to our own hearts by faith. The lamb saved the Jews and it also sustained them for their journey. You “feed” on Jesus Christ when you meditate on His Word and make its truths a part of your inner person.

Leaven. Yeast is a picture of sin: it begins small but spreads quickly; it puffs up; and it works secretly. When you are saved by the blood of Christ, you want to have a life that is pure and free from known sin. The Jews were not saved by getting rid of the leaven; they got rid of the leaven because God had saved them (2 Cor. 7:1; 2 Tim. 2:19). Note how Paul applied these truths in 1 Corinthians 5.

EXODUS 13

Remembering. God wanted Israel to remember what His hand had done for them (vv. 3, 9, 14, 16), lest in the future they forget to trust Him and serve Him. The setting apart of the firstborn would remind them that the firstborn sons of Israel had been redeemed by the Lord. The annual Passover would remind them to keep their lives pure. When you consider that Jesus Christ has redeemed us by His blood, surely we should give ourselves to Him and obey His Word.

Instructing. The younger generation cannot know the works of the Lord unless the older generation tells them. The Word of God must control our lips (v. 9), our eyes, and our hands (v. 16), and we must share it with others. The Jews took this literally and wore portions of the Law on the forehead and hand, but the Lord was surely speaking in a metaphorical way.

Following. God frees us from bondage, and He also guides

us to the inheritance He has prepared for us. His Word is like that pillar of cloud and fire, and He will show us the way if we will trust Him.

EXODUS 14

God sees before (1–19). God knew Pharaoh's plans and saw to it that Israel was cared for. This is *providence*, which means "to see before." He is Jehovah-Jireh (Gen. 22:14), "the Lord will see to it." No matter what the enemy plans to do to you, God has already taken care of it and will tell you what to do.

God comes between (19–20). The pillar that brought light to Israel brought darkness to the enemy. The people of the world are walking in darkness, but God's people have "the light of life" (John 8:12). The enemy cannot touch you without first encountering God.

God goes ahead (21–25). He opens the way and does the impossible. The next time you are in a seemingly impossible situation, remember what God did for Israel at the Red Sea. The people of Israel never forgot this victory (Pss. 66:6; 106:9; 136:13–14). Recalling God's past help can encourage you as you face future challenges to your faith.

God comes behind (26–31). Isaiah stated, "And the God of Israel will be your rear guard" (Isa. 52:12). The defeat was complete; the Egyptian army was no more. There is much truth in these words: "And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith" (1 John 5:4).

EXODUS 15

The Lord who triumphs (1–21). When they walked by sight, Israel complained (14:10–12); but when they believed God and saw His mighty hand at work, they praised Him. Redemption should lead to rejoicing (Luke 15:1–24).

This first recorded song in Scripture is a pattern for true worship, for it emphasizes the Lord, who He is, and what He has done for His people. He saves His people (vv. 1–10), guides them to their inheritance (vv. 11–13), glorifies His name (vv. 14–17), and reigns forever (v. 18). Today, let God be your strength, your song, and your salvation (v. 2; see also Ps. 118:14; Isa. 12:2).

The Lord who heals (22–26). The people went from rejoicing to complaining! It is easy to sing when the circumstances are comfortable, but it takes faith to sing when you are suffering. God tests us in the everyday experiences of life to see whether we will obey Him. He is able to change our circumstances, but He would rather change us (Phil. 4:10–13).

The Lord who refreshes (27). Life is not always battles and bitter waters. God brings us to the refreshing oases from time to time, and for this we should praise Him. However, we can never claim our inheritance if we linger at Elim. We are pilgrims, not residents.

Praise Him with Song

Singing is an important part of the Christian life, for it enables us to praise God and bear witness to others. Our praise should come from the Holy Spirit within (Eph. 5:18–20) and be based on Scripture (Col. 3:16). In this way, we worship Him “in spirit and truth” (John 4:24).

EXODUS 16

The redeemed Jews were acting like unsaved Gentiles, for they asked, “What shall we eat? What shall we drink?” (Matt. 6:25–34). God did not rescue them from bondage in order to kill them with hunger! (See Rom. 8:31–32.) Their real problem was that they still had the old appetite and needed to learn to enjoy the new food God had for them.

The manna is a picture of Jesus Christ (John 6:30ff.). The manna came only to Israel, and all it could do was sustain physical life. But the Savior came for the whole world, and He gives spiritual life. If the Jews did not appropriate the manna, they died. Sinners must believe on Jesus Christ to receive life.

Feeding on the manna is also a picture of your daily appropriation of Christ through the Word of God. Just as your food

becomes a part of your very being, so the Word strengthens your inner person when you read it, meditate on it, and obey it. Just as the Jews could not live on yesterday's manna, so you cannot live on yesterday's spiritual diet. Begin each day with the Lord, and He will give you what you need for facing the burdens and battles ahead.

Spiritual Food

God's Word is food for the inner person. It is milk (1 Pet. 2:2), bread (Matt. 4:4), meat (1 Cor. 3:1-2; Heb. 5:11-14), and honey (Ps. 119:103). Feeding on the Word should bring joy to our hearts (Jer. 15:16), and we should desire spiritual food more than physical food (Job 23:12; Luke 10:38-42).

EXODUS 17

Another test (1-7). You never solve your problems by blaming other people. Israel's real problem was unbelief and a desire to go back to the old life. Every difficulty you meet is an opportunity for testing yourself and trusting your Lord, for going forward or going backward. The rock pictures Jesus Christ who was smitten for us (1 Cor. 10:4) that we might have the living water of the Holy Spirit within (John 7:37-39).

Another enemy (8-13). The Egyptian army had been drowned, but the Amalekites were very much alive and did not want Israel in their territory. It was Esau fighting Jacob again (Gen. 36:12). It takes intercession on the mountain as well as intervention in the valley for God's people to win the victory. Israel watched God defeat Egypt, but now they had to enter the battle themselves and trust God for victory. Our High Priest intercedes in heaven for us (Heb. 4:14-16). This is the first mention of Joshua in Scripture. Little did he know that one day he would take Moses' place as leader of God's people.

Another assurance (14-16). Each test can tell you something new about yourself and about the Lord (Gen. 22:14; Exod. 15:26). When you face the battles of life, remember that He is your banner and can give you victory (John 16:33; 1 John 5:4-5).

EXODUS 18

Balance. Moses experienced some exciting things after leaving Egypt, but now he returns to the everyday duties of life. God balances our lives and gives us enough burdens to keep us humble and enough blessings to keep us happy. Moses returned to his family, told them all that God had done, and then worshiped the Lord with them.

Counsel. Sometimes an outsider can see things more clearly than those who are doing the work, and we must always be open to counsel (Prov. 12:15; 13:10). Moses was trying to do all the work himself, and he was not making a distinction between major matters and minor problems. He needed assistants, and he needed priorities. Note that Jethro expected Moses to seek God's will in the matter (v. 23). What seems like good counsel from men might be bad counsel in God's sight, so we must always ask for God's directions (Acts 27:9-14).

Leadership. Verse 21 describes the kind of leaders God needs, people characterized by ability, the fear of God, honesty, and a hatred for covetousness. (See Acts 6:3 for additional leadership qualities.) Moses was a great man, but he could not do the job alone. God may not call you to be a leader, but He may want you to help a leader do a better job.

EXODUS 19

A special people. At the Red Sea, God separated His people from their old life; at Sinai, He brought them into a new life, a covenant relationship with Himself. It was like a wedding ceremony, with God as the Husband and Israel as the wife. Whenever the nation turned from God to idols, God accused them of committing adultery (Isa. 1:21; Jer. 3:1-5). Believers today must also beware this sin (James 4:4). The church is a nation of kings and priests (1 Pet. 2:5, 9) called to glorify God.

A sanctified people. Because we belong to God, we must be separated from sin (vv. 10, 14, 22). God's people are set apart from the world and unto the Lord.

A submissive people. To impress the people with the fear of the Lord, God demonstrated His power at Sinai and warned them not to come near. It was the childhood of the nation, and the people, like children, learned from rewards and punishments. Hebrews 12:18–29 contrasts this experience with that of the New Testament believer today. We must still fear the Lord and respect the boundaries He establishes, but we are invited to “draw near” (Heb. 10:19–25). The Israelites were not saved from Egypt by obeying the Law, but their obedience enabled them to enjoy all the blessings God had for them.

We Are Set Apart

To be sanctified means to be set apart for God's exclusive use and pleasure. Christians are set apart by the death of Christ (Heb. 10:10), the indwelling Spirit (Rom. 15:16), and the Word of God (John 17:17; Eph. 5:26).

EXODUS 20

The Law does not save sinners (Gal. 2:21; 3:21); it reveals God's holiness and man's need for salvation (Rom. 3:20). It is a mirror that shows us how dirty we are (James 1:22–2), but it does not provide the cleansing we need. Only Christ can do that.

Under the old covenant, God's law was written on tables of stone (Exod. 24:12), but under the new covenant, God writes His word on our hearts (2 Cor. 3:1–3). As you meditate on the Word, the Spirit makes it a part of your inner being, and you become more like the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 3:18). The Holy Spirit enables us to fulfill the righteous demands of God's law (Rom. 8:1–4).

The first four commandments deal with our relationship with God, while the last six deal with our relationship with others. If we love God and obey Him, we will also love others and serve them. (See Matt. 22:34-40.)

Some people obey God because of fear (vv. 18-21). Others obey only because they want His blessing. The highest motive for obedience is our love for the Lord. But what if we disobey the Lord? God made provision for Israel in the prescribed sacrifices (vv. 22-26). He has made provision for believers today through the work of Christ (1 John 1:9-2:2). Believers are not under law but under grace. This is not an excuse for sin but an encouragement for loving obedience to His will. Ponder Romans 6.

EXODUS 21

Having stated His basic law, God then told Moses how to apply it to specific situations so that everybody would receive equal justice, which is the principle in verses 22-25. No person was to take the law into his or her own hands. When it comes to *personal* retaliation, we must obey Matthew 5:38-48.

God's law shows that He is concerned about everything: men, women, children, the unborn, property, and even animals. This is His creation, and He has the right to tell us how to manage it. The Law did not change people's hearts, but it did help to control their conduct and give order to the nation. Laws and government have been instituted by God, and we should respect them (Rom. 13).

Some penalties given here may seem harsh to us; but keep in mind that the nation was in its "childhood" (Gal. 4:1-7), and children learn best through rewards and punishments. Forty years later, when the new generation was on the scene, Moses emphasized love when he repeated the Law (Deut. 4:37; 6:4-6; 7:6-13). Love is the fulfilling of the Law (Rom. 13:8-10).

EXODUS 22

Property (1-15). God wants us to respect personal property, and the key idea here is *restitution* (vv. 3, 5, 6, 12). It is not enough to admit the crime and show sorrow over it. There

must also be a readiness to make things right with those who have been hurt (Prov. 6:30-31; Luke 19:8). David knew verse 1 and could apply it to others (2 Sam. 12:1-6), but he did not apply Exodus 20:13-14 to himself.

Persons (16-27). These many laws reveal the holiness of God and His desire that we be a holy people (v. 31). When obeyed, these laws protected the people from violence, extortion, oppression, and affliction. God has compassion on widows and orphans, poor workers (James 5:1-4), and strangers. Do we?

Principles (28-31). Respect God and put Him first in everything. Jesus summarized it in Matthew 6:33. If we truly love God with all our hearts, we will have no desire to hurt others. But if God is not first, we will start exploiting people to get what we want.

EXODUS 23

Consideration (1-9). Treating people justly would seem to be an easy thing to do, but the sinful human heart can lead us astray with rumors (2 Cor. 13:1), false witnesses, crowds, and money. The fact that a person is rich or poor, a friend or an enemy, must not blind us to the truth. Integrity must not be for sale.

Conservation (10-13). The Sabbath was God's special gift to Israel to mark the nation as His holy people (Exod. 31:13-17). It was also His gift to man and beast to provide needed rest. The Sabbatical Year showed His concern for the land and the poor. It is unfortunate that people today have forgotten these lessons and are destroying creation by their exploitation of resources.

Celebration (14-19). God wants His people to celebrate and rejoice in His goodness. If our celebration ignores the Lord, we are guilty of idolatry. (See 1 Tim. 6:17.)

Consecration (20-33). The nation would be entering enemy territory and would be tempted to compromise with the wicked people of the land. They must not even speak about the false gods (v. 13) lest they would be led to bow down and serve those gods (v. 24) and make covenants with them (v. 32). Do not talk yourself into disobeying God!

EXODUS 24

There are degrees of nearness to God. The people remained at a distance because of their fear of the Lord. Moses, Joshua, Nadab, Abihu, Aaron, and seventy of the elders went up the mountain to meet God. Then Moses and Joshua went further, and finally Moses went into the glory cloud alone.

J. Oswald Sanders wisely commented, "We are at this moment *as close to God as we really choose to be*." God invites us to draw near (James 4:8), but often we are unwilling to do what is necessary to meet Him. The people below had the Book and the blood, and they made promises to obey God; but they did not have the vision of the glory of the Lord that Moses had on the mount.

You would think verse 11 would read, "So they saw God, and they fell down and prayed." But it says, "They ate and drank." The vision of God's glory should not make us careless or impractical. We can eat and drink to His glory (1 Cor. 10:31). But beware lest nearness to God lead to careless familiarity, for "our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:28-29). Nadab and Abihu would find that out (Lev. 10:1ff.).

EXODUS 25

An offering. God could have made the whole tabernacle in an instant of creative power, but instead He asked the people to bring Him their offerings. They were privileged to make a sanctuary for God. Today, we are helping to build His church, and we must use only the best materials (1 Cor. 3:9-23). Are you giving willingly to God what He has given to you?

A pattern. God gave Moses the pattern for the tabernacle just as He later gave David the pattern for the temple (1 Chron. 28:19). When God wants a work done on earth, He has a plan for His people to follow. It is dangerous to turn from God's plan and follow the wisdom of this world (1 Cor. 3:18-20).

The ark was the throne of God in the Holy of Holies, and God's glory dwelt between the cherubim on the mercy seat (Ps. 99:1). Our mercy seat is in heaven (Heb. 4:11-16), and the way is always open to God.

The table reminds us that God is the source of our suste-

nance (Matt. 6:11). The bread also speaks of the spiritual nourishment we have in His Word (Deut. 8:3; Matt. 4:4). The golden candlestick tells us that "God is light" (1 John 1:5) and that we are to be lights in this dark world (Matt. 5:14-16). Just as the lamps were fed by the oil, so we must have the power of the Spirit to be effective witnesses for the Lord (Acts 1:8).

EXODUS 26

Ten curtains, fifty loops, fifty clasps, forty sockets, twenty boards, two veils—yet it was one sanctuary: "That it may be one tabernacle" (v. 6); "That it may be one" (v. 11). Diversity, yes; but unity in diversity.

There was only *one plan* for the tabernacle, and it came from God (v. 30). Man's cleverness and wisdom may bring success in the things of the world (Luke 16:8), but they will destroy the work of the Lord (1 Cor. 3:16-23). Be sure you get your plans from heaven and not from the world.

There was *one set of measurements* for the building (v. 2). When we measure ministry by God's standards, we will have unity, but if we use our own standards, there will be division.

They used only *the materials* that God told them to use. In 1 Corinthians 3:10-16, read about building with the proper materials that will endure. Note the emphasis on gold in chapter 37, silver in chapter 38, and precious stones in chapter 39.

The sanctuary was indwelt by *one glory*, the glory of God. When man brings in his glory, there is division.

Jesus prayed that His people might be one (John 17:20-23). Are you helping to answer that prayer?

EXODUS 27

The tabernacle was not a gathering place for worship but a place for sacrifice and holy service.

Sacrifice. The first thing one saw was the brazen altar, for no one can come into the presence of God until sin has been dealt with (Lev. 17:11).

Separation. The tent was surrounded by a fence of linen hangings, for only the priests and Levites could enter the sacred courts. The common people were kept out of the courts

and the priests out of the Holy of Holies. God wanted *all* His people to be priests (Exod. 19:5-6), but that would not happen until the finished work of Christ on the cross (1 Pet. 2:5, 9). We today have open access to the presence of God through Jesus Christ (Heb. 10:19-25).

Shining. The lampstand stood in the holy place and helped the priests to see as they served. It did not illumine the camp; the glory of God did that (Exod. 40:38). God's people (Phil. 2:15) and His churches (Rev. 1:12, 20) are lights in this dark world. Be sure you keep your lamp trimmed and your light shining (Matt. 5:16).

EXODUS 28

The priesthood was both a privilege and a responsibility. It was wonderful to wear the glorious garments and be in the holy courts, but being a priest also brought serious obligations.

They ministered first to the Lord. Four times in this chapter, God emphasized this point (vv. 1, 3, 4, 41). God's servants must seek to please Him alone (1 Cor. 4:1-7). We must be "bondservants for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor. 4:5).

They ministered to the people. God's people are like jewels to Him (Mal. 3:17). Our great High Priest carries us over His heart and on His shoulders. He represents us before the throne of God so that we are "accepted in the Beloved" (Eph. 1:6).

They ministered together. God supplied their needs as they served the people. There was no competition or confusion in the holy tabernacle because they served the same Lord and obeyed the same Word. God has a ministry for each of us, and He will equip us to do it.

EXODUS 29

We dedicate, but God consecrates. We surrender, but He sanctifies and sets us apart for His exclusive use. As God's priesthood, His people have experienced *spiritually* what Aaron and his sons experienced physically.

We have been washed. The blood of Christ has cleansed us (Rev. 1:5-6), and our past is gone (1 Cor. 6:9-11). Sinful hearts are purified not by religious rites but by faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 15:9; Titus 3:5).

We have been clothed. We stand in the very righteousness of Christ (Isa. 61:10; 2 Cor. 5:21) and wear the garments of God's grace (Col. 3:1ff.).

We have been anointed. We have the Holy Spirit living within (2 Cor. 1:21; 1 John 2:27), and He enables us to minister.

We belong to God. The priests were "marked" by the blood on the ear (hear God), the hand (serve God), and the foot (walk with God). The "continual burnt offering" morning and evening was a reminder of their complete and constant devotion to God. Don't forget your daily presentation of yourself to God (Rom. 12:1-2).

EXODUS 30

Remember to pray. The golden altar before the veil symbolized the ministry of prayer (Ps. 141:1-3; Rev. 5:8). God's people today don't stand before the veil: they enter the very presence of God. We need the "fire" of the Holy Spirit or our prayers are heartless (Rom. 8:23-27). Prayer is special, and we must not treat it as common (vv. 34-38).

Remember you are ransomed. They were not redeemed by paying money, nor are we (1 Pet. 1:18ff.); but paying the annual half-shekel reminded them of what God had done for them. The silver was used to make the sockets for the posts of the tabernacle (38:25-37). The foundation for everything is redemption.

Remember to keep clean. Like the priests, we are washed once at redemption, but we must keep clean in our daily walk. If they became defiled even while serving the Lord in the holy tabernacle, what must happen to us as we serve in an evil world!

Remember to honor the Holy Spirit. The holy anointing oil symbolizes the Spirit of God. We must beware trying to duplicate His work by human effort or treating Him in a common way (vv. 32-33). (See Eph. 4:30-32.)

EXODUS 31

Work. When God wants to get a job done, He calls workers, equips them, and gives them the plan for the task. He also calls people to help them and to provide the needed resources. Bezalel and Aholiab were gifted artisans, but they needed God's calling and enabling before they could do the work to please Him.

Rest. Why did God mention the Sabbath at this point? Perhaps He wanted to remind His people that even the building of the sacred tabernacle was not a reason for breaking the Sabbath law. They needed a day of rest, and since the Sabbath was a sign between God and His people, they needed to honor Him. God wants us to be balanced: work, rest, worship.

Law. Luke 11:20 suggests that "the finger of God" signifies the Holy Spirit, who wrote the Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21). He now writes it on the hearts of those who trust Christ and worship Him (2 Cor. 3:1ff.).

EXODUS 32

Unbelief. Despite all that God had said and done, and all that Israel had promised to do (19:8), the nation did not know how to live by faith. Moses had been gone forty days (Deut. 9:11ff.), and the people had become impatient. They still had the fire and cloud to assure them of God's presence, but that was not enough. They wanted another visible representation of Jehovah to encourage them. It was unbelief: "Whoever believes will not act hastily" (Isa. 28:16).

Compromise. Aaron was supposed to be the spiritual leader in the absence of Moses, but instead he gave in and let the people have their way. When confronted with his sin, Aaron blamed the people, Moses, and the furnace (vv. 22-24), but he did not blame himself.

Intercession. Had Moses been a selfish man, he could have become the founder of a new nation, but he loved the people and prayed for their forgiveness. (See Luke 23:34; Rom. 9:1-3.) He reminded God of His covenant and of the glory He would lose if the nation were destroyed. When you pray, remind God of His promises and seek to magnify His glory.

Discipline. We all should heed the psalmist's wise words: "You who love the LORD, hate evil" (Ps. 97:10). God in His grace forgives the sinner, but in His government, He must punish the sin. This judgment may seem cruel to us, but the people had been warned against idolatry and had willfully disobeyed God. God had to teach them early not to act like the heathen nations around them. Israel had to remain a separated people, or God could not work out His great purposes through them.

EXODUS 33

God's friendship. The tabernacle had not yet been built, so the structure referred to here was probably a tent where Moses met with God and over which the cloud rested. God spoke to Moses as with a friend because Moses obeyed God (Deut. 34:10; John 15:14-16). God could not dwell with a rebellious people, but He could fellowship with Moses (2 Cor. 6:14-18).

God's Glory

The glory of God is the manifestation of all His attributes and character, all that He is and says and does. Everything about God is glorious, and the highest activity of man is to glorify God (Matt. 5:16; 1 Cor. 10:31). All who trust Christ share His glory today and will see His glory in heaven (John 17:22-24).

God's presence. The Jews *watched* things happen, but Moses *made* things happen. He knew God's ways (Ps. 103:7) and prayed for God's presence to go with them. Moses could not pray on the basis of Israel's obedience to the Law, but he could plead the grace of God. Believers today are sure of

God's presence because He has promised to stay with us (Heb. 13:5-6).

God's glory. Many believers pray, "Show me Your way," but not many pray, "Show me Your glory." No man can see God in His fullness and live, but God can reveal some of His glory. He did that for Moses "in the secret place of the Most High" (Ps. 91:1-4). Our experience of glory today is explained in 2 Corinthians 3:18.

EXODUS 34

A gracious God (1-9). Because He is gracious and long-suffering, God gave His people another opportunity, just as He does with us today (1 John 2:1-2). He gave a "second chance" to Abraham (Gen. 13:1ff.), Jonah (Jon. 3:1), and Peter (John 21:15ff.). The enemy accuses us and wants us to quit, but God is ready to forgive when we turn to Him (Pss. 103:10-14; 130:3-4).

A jealous God (10-29). God works for us, but He expects us to walk with Him. He will keep His covenant, but we must beware not to compromise with evil. It is easy to get into sin gradually. First there is agreement in worship (vv. 12-13), then sacrifice (v. 15), then marriage (v. 16); and the result is the loss of our children to false gods. Note the emphasis on putting God first (vv. 19-22, 26).

A glorious God (30-35). Moses not only sought God's glory and saw it on the mount, but he shared it as it reflected from his own face. However, this glory faded away, just like the glory of the Law. As we see Christ in the Word, and the Spirit makes us more like Him, we go "from glory to glory" (2 Cor. 3:12-18; see also Prov. 4:18; Matt. 17:1-8; Acts 6:15).

EXODUS 35—39

Each aspect of the making of the tabernacle is mentioned in detail because each part was important to God. The smallest wooden peg had to conform to the pattern God gave Moses on the mount. If we expect God to be concerned about the details of our lives, we must pay attention to the details of His instructions.

The construction of the tabernacle involved God's pattern and man's provision. The people had plundered the Egyptians (12:35-36), and they willingly brought that wealth to the Lord. It was an act of spontaneous generosity and not something that was forced from them (35:5, 21-22, 26, 29). Christians today should give in the same way (2 Cor. 8:1-12).

God gave the plan, and He also gave the workers the wisdom needed to do the job right (35:10, 25, 34-35). There is nothing wrong with dedicated artistry, for God built beauty into His tabernacle. God wants skillful hands as well as dedicated hearts (Ps. 78:72).

Moses was careful to inspect the work to see that it was just what God had commanded. (The word *commanded* is found seventeen times in these chapters.) Moses was faithful as the servant of God to do what God told him to do (Heb. 3:5).

Chapter 39 ends by saying, "And Moses blessed them" (v. 43). Have you taken time lately to bless those who have done the will of God in serving you? (See Ruth 2:4.)

EXODUS 40

Finished. All the framework, hangings, and pieces of furniture were completed, along with the priests' garments; but Moses waited for the Lord to tell him what to do next. Wise is the leader who gets his orders from God.

Furnished. God told Moses what to do and when to do it. First they were to set up the tent and then put in the six special pieces of furniture, starting with the ark in the Holy of Holies. The right order was as significant as the right furnishings. When he finished with the tent and the furniture, he put up the court around it and set it apart from the rest of the camp.

Fragrant. Everything in the tabernacle was anointed with the holy oil, which set it all apart for God's use. Is there a fragrance about our lives that makes people think of heaven?

Filled. Two things made the tabernacle a special building: the pattern was given by God, and God's glorious presence filled it when He came to dwell with His people. What a gracious God that He should consent to dwell with such a rebellious people!

God's Dwelling Places

First, God walked with man (Gen. 5:24; 6:9); then He desired to dwell with him (Exod. 25:8). His glory came to the tabernacle (Exod. 40:34), but when Israel sinned, the glory departed (1 Sam. 4:21-22). The glory dwelt in the temple (1 Kings 8:10-11), but then departed again because of the sins of the people (Ezek. 11:22-23). The glory came in the person of Jesus Christ (John 1:14) and dwells now in believers individually (1 Cor. 6:19-20) and the church collectively (Eph. 2:20-22). One day God's glory will be revealed in a new heaven and earth and a perfect city where His people will dwell forever (Rev. 21-22).

LEVITICUS

The name of this book means "pertaining to the Levites." Exodus and Leviticus were guidebooks for the priests in their ministry. Israel today has neither priesthood nor temple, so the nation cannot obey these laws (Hos. 3:4), but Leviticus has great value to the Christian. It illustrates the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ and stresses the importance of a life of separation and obedience.

Jesus Christ in the Sacrifices

1. Burnt offering	<i>He showed perfect dedication to God.</i>	<i>John 10:17; Rom. 5:19; Heb. 10:10</i>
2. Grain offering	<i>He had a perfect character, a fragrance to God.</i>	<i>Eph. 5:2</i>
3. Peace offering	<i>He made peace between God and man and between Jew and Gentile.</i>	<i>Rom. 5:1; Eph. 2:14, 17; Col. 1:20</i>
4. Sin offering	<i>He was made sin for us on the cross.</i>	<i>2 Cor. 5:17; 1 Pet. 2:24</i>
5. Trespass offering	<i>He assumed the debt for our sins and paid it.</i>	<i>Luke 7:36-50</i>

The book emphasizes *sacrifice* (chaps. 1–10), for man must deal with his sins if he expects to have fellowship with a holy God. These five sacrifices are fulfilled in Jesus Christ and picture His perfect life and atoning work on the cross (Heb. 10:1–14).

Leviticus also emphasizes *separation* (chaps. 11–24), for a redeemed people should walk in God's holy will. These various laws touch on many aspects of everyday life and illustrate principles of holy living that God's children should follow today.

Finally, since God anticipated the nation's entrance into the Promised Land, He gave them some rules for *success* (chaps. 25–27). The land was theirs because of God's covenant, but they could enjoy it only if they obeyed God's will. Obedience by faith always brings blessing.

LEVITICUS 1

"All on the altar" (v. 9) is the key to this sacrifice, for it speaks of complete dedication to the Lord. The animal was an involuntary sacrifice that died, but God's people are to be willing *living* sacrifices (Rom. 12:1–2). Do you put *your* "all on the altar" at the beginning of each day (Lev. 6:8–13)?

The offering must be brought to the Lord, and its purpose must be to please the Lord as a "sweet aroma" (vv. 9, 13, 17). People may not understand you, but if you seek to please Him, He will accept it (1 Pet. 2:5).

No matter how poor we may feel, or how little we think we have to give Him, He will receive what we have and bless it (vv. 14–17). The important thing is that we give our all to Him each day.

The priest started each day by sacrificing a burnt offering. It became the foundation for all the other offerings put on the altar (Exod. 29:38–42; Lev. 3:5). Unless we have our "all on the altar," our other sacrifices will not mean much to the Lord.

LEVITICUS 2

There was no shedding of blood involved in the grain offering, for it focused on the life and character of our Lord Jesus Christ rather than on His death. In Him was perfect balance;

nothing was ever in excess. His life on earth pleased God (Matt. 17:5). As we become more like Him, we shall become more and more balanced in character.

The oil symbolizes the Holy Spirit who has anointed each believer (2 Cor. 1:21–22). The oil *mixed* with the offering (v. 4) reminds us that our Lord was born of the Spirit with a perfect nature (Luke 1:35). The oil *poured* on the offering (v. 6) speaks of the power of the Spirit given to the Savior (Acts 10:38). We need the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23) and the power of the Spirit (Acts 1:8) if we are to please God in character and service.

Note that God never wants leaven (a picture of sin [1 Cor. 5:6–8]) or honey (man's glory and not God's [Prov. 25:27]). But He does want salt, which speaks of purity (Col. 4:6), and frankincense, which is praise to God. What a privilege it is to build a Christian life that brings glory to God!

LEVITICUS 3

Religion is man's attempt to make peace with God on his own terms. Redemption is God's offer of peace through Jesus Christ. But this is "peace through the blood of His cross" (Col. 1:20). The animal sacrifice had to die and the blood had to be sprinkled on the altar before God could declare peace.

Peace with God is a precious blessing that we must never take for granted: "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1).

After the sacrifice, the worshiper and his family would eat what remained once the priest had taken his rightful share (7:11–18). It was to be a joyful feast of fellowship. In fact, the Jews were to consider it a peace offering whenever they slaughtered an animal for food (17:1–9). Do you strive to make each meal an occasion of fellowship and praise to God? If we would present ourselves and the food to Him as an act of worship, our meals might become much happier occasions.

LEVITICUS 4

The sin offering was for unintentional sins of ignorance and not for deliberate sins of disobedience. For deliberate sins,

God made no provision for a sacrifice (Num. 15:30–31). All the offender could do was plead the mercy of God (Ps. 51:16–17).

But ignorance is no excuse in God's sight! Once we know that we have sinned, we must come to God for forgiveness. Jesus Christ was the sin offering for the whole world, including ignorant Israel (Luke 23:34; Acts 3:17). Our Lord's prayer on Calvary did not automatically forgive their sins, because the people did not repent; but it did postpone the outpouring of God's wrath for nearly forty years.

The priest's sacrifice was the same as that of the whole congregation (vv. 3, 14), for the higher the privilege, the greater the responsibility (Luke 12:48). But when the offerings were brought by faith, God promised to forgive (vv. 20, 26, 31, 35). Of course, the final and complete atonement was wrought by Jesus Christ on the cross (Heb. 10:1–14).

When we sin, it affects our prayer life. This is why the priest had to cleanse the golden altar (v. 7). (See Ps. 66:18.)

LEVITICUS 5

The trespass offering could involve both sacrifice and restitution. It reminds us that sin harms others (v. 16) and that true repentance ought to result in our making right the things we have done wrong.

The sin offering deals with the fact that we are sinners by nature, while the trespass offering deals with individual acts of sin. We must be honest with God about both what we are and what we do (1 John 1:8, 10).

Sometimes we commit sin by keeping quiet (v. 1), or we may cover up (vv. 2–3) or speak out (v. 4). Our sins may be unintentional, and we may be ignorant of them; but once we know about them, we must come to God for cleansing. Sin is *not* "deliberate disobedience to a *known* law." If we disobey God, we are guilty whether we realize it or not.

Have you claimed 1 John 1:9 lately?

LEVITICUS 6—7

Let's follow the example of the priest and each morning get rid of the old ashes, stir up the fire, and offer a burnt offering to the Lord (Rom. 12:1–2). The phrase "stir up" in 2 Timothy 1:6

means “stir up the flame into life again.” Is the flame burning high on the altar of your heart (Luke 24:32), or are you getting lukewarm (Rev. 3:15–16) or cold (Matt. 24:12)?

Let’s also keep the leaven out of our lives (6:14–18), which includes hypocrisy (Luke 12:1), false doctrine (Gal. 5:8–9), and corrupt living (1 Cor. 5:6ff.).

The sin offering was so holy that it could not remain in the defiled camp; it had to be taken outside the camp (5:11–12; see also Heb. 13:10–13). The priests were permitted to eat their share, but only in the holy court of the tabernacle because whatever the offering touched was made holy. Fellowship with God and one another depends on purity (7:19–21).

LEVITICUS 8—9

Altar is a key word in these chapters; it is used twenty-three times. Without an altar, there can be no acceptable sacrifice; without a sacrifice, man cannot approach a holy God. But there must also be a priesthood to serve at the altar. In the Old Testament, God’s people *had* a priesthood, but in the New Testament, God’s people *are* a priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5, 9).

What made the priests acceptable to God? Water (8:6), oil (8:10–12), blood (8:14–29), and garments (8:7–9). We have been washed (1 Cor. 6:11), anointed by the Spirit (1 John 2:20, 27), redeemed by Christ’s blood (1 Pet. 1:18ff.), and dressed in His righteousness (Isa. 61:10).

The day of dedication began a week of consecration (8:31–36), and the week ended with Aaron’s blessing the people and the Lord’s accepting the sacrifices (9:22–24). The glory of the Lord appeared (9:6, 23), which is the purpose of sacrifice and service. Can people say of our worship, “God is truly among you” (1 Cor. 14:25)?

LEVITICUS 10

It did not take long for sin to enter the priestly family. After a great experience with the Lord, beware the enemy’s attack. Elijah ran away after the great victory at Mount Carmel (1 Kings 19), and Jesus was tempted after His baptism at the Jordan (Matt. 3:13–4:11). Great blessings sometimes mean great temptations.

Eleven times in chapters 8–9 you find the phrase “the LORD commanded.” Nadab and Abihu did what the Lord had *not* commanded, and the fire of God killed them (Heb. 12:29). At the beginning of new periods in redemptive history, God judged sin in a dramatic way so that the people would learn to fear Him (Josh. 7; Acts 5:1–11).

Did their sin have something to do with strong drink (vv. 8–11)? Paul’s admonition in Ephesians 5:18ff. is appropriate here, for there is no acceptable substitute in ministry for the power of the Holy Spirit.

Aaron obeyed the spirit of the commandment but not the letter. Had he obeyed the letter, he would have been insincere before God, and God would have known that his heart was not in it. Moses looked at the outward appearance, but God looked on the heart (1 Sam. 16:7). God knows your heart and understands you, even when others are critical (1 John 3:20–21).

LEVITICUS 11

Defilement. Chapters 11–15 focus on the concept of “clean” and “unclean” in the areas of food (11), birth (12), disease (13–14), and normal bodily functions (15). Although the laws certainly served a practical hygienic purpose, there was also a spiritual principle involved. As God’s people, Israel had to be separated from everything that God called unclean. Other nations might be able to do those things, but the Jews could not (vv. 44–45). Defilement spreads, and one person’s carelessness could affect many people.

Discernment. If they wanted to be pleasing to God, the people had to exercise discernment (vv. 46–47); the priests were supposed to teach them God’s will (Ezek. 44:23). The dietary laws were temporary (Mark 7:14–23; Acts 10:9–18; 1 Tim. 4:1–5), but the principle is permanent: believers must have discernment and avoid what is unclean (2 Cor. 7:1; Phil. 1:9–11; Heb. 5:14).

LEVITICUS 12

Birth. There is no suggestion here that either conception or birth is an act of sin. After all, God created sex and told us to

be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 1:28). God reminds us that we are conceived sinners (Pss. 51:5; 58:3) and therefore need His grace.

Compassion. Is a female child twice as unclean as a male child? Of course not, for there were no degrees of uncleanness. God was giving the mother extra time to care for a daughter in a masculine society that preferred sons. He was also giving her time to recuperate before the next pregnancy. A husband to whom she bore a daughter might be anxious to try again for a son.

Grace. Even the poorest could bring an acceptable sacrifice, and God would receive it (v. 8). This is the sacrifice that Joseph and Mary brought when they dedicated Jesus (Luke 2:22-24). Truly, He became poor that we might be rich (2 Cor. 8:9).

LEVITICUS 13

Concern. Leprosy was a feared disease for which there was no known cure. God had concern for the leper and made certain he or she was treated with dignity. God gave the priest all the information needed to detect the disease and make sure it did not spread. How tragic it would be to isolate someone who was not really infected or to declare clean somebody who was unclean.

Characteristics. There is more to this law than a lesson in symptoms; in the Bible, leprosy is a picture of sin (Isa. 1:4-6). The disease was not on the surface; like sin, it was "deeper than the skin." (The phrase is used ten times.) Leprosy spreads in the system and makes the person unclean, so much so that he or she had to be isolated: "He shall dwell alone" (v. 46). How like sin!

Compassion. Our Lord had compassion on the lepers, touched them, and made them clean (Mark 1:40-45); and He gave His disciples power to cleanse the lepers (Matt. 10:8). What Jesus did for all of us is beautifully pictured in the next chapter.

LEVITICUS 14

This ceremony of restoration for the healed leper pictures our Lord's work of redemption. Jesus went outside the camp to

meet us and to die for us (Luke 19:10; Heb. 13:10–13). He identified Himself with the outcasts (Matt. 9:10–13)! Whatever is infected with leprosy is fit for the fire (13:52), but He rescued us.

Birds don't belong in clay jars; they ought to be flying in the heavens. This is a picture of our Lord's incarnation, when He took upon Himself a human body that He might die for our sins. Their turning the living bird loose pictured His resurrection from the dead. The former leper was treated like a priest! (Compare vv. 14–20 with Lev. 8:22–24.) God has made us "kings and priests" through the blood of Christ (Rev. 1:6). Hallelujah, what a Savior!

LEVITICUS 15

The key words in this chapter are *discharge* (twenty-four times), *unclean* (twenty-nine times) and *bathe in water* (eleven times). Verses 1–15 refer to discharges from infections, while verses 16–30 refer to the discharges from the normal functions of the body. No doubt sanitation and health were parts of these laws, but fundamentally God was teaching His people how to live separate from defilement (vv. 31–33).

The body is not sinful, and bodily functions are not morally defiling. But man's nature (what the Bible calls "the flesh") is sinful and produces what is sinful and defiling (Mark 7:20–23; Gal. 5:19–21). If we are not careful, what we say and do, and what we are, will touch others and defile them as well (vv. 5–12; Matt. 23:25–28).

God made provision for Israel's ceremonial uncleanness, and He has made provision for us. Our heavenly Advocate cleanses us when we come in contrition and confession (1 John 1:5–2:2; see also John 13:1–11). He keeps us clean through His blood (1 John 1:7) and through the cleansing power of His Word (John 15:3; Eph. 5:25–27).

LEVITICUS 16

The most important day. The annual Day of Atonement was the most significant of Israel's special days because on it their sins were atoned for. It was the only time the high priest was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies. Nadab and Abihu tried to do it their own way and were judged (Lev. 10), so this ceremony was a matter of life and death.

The most important person. You can see the Lord Jesus illustrated in the high priest. He did the work alone. He laid aside His garments of glory (Phil. 2:5-8), and He sanctified Himself for us (John 17:19). The difference is that Jesus did not offer any sacrifices for Himself because He is sinless. He Himself *is* the perfect and final sacrifice for the sins of the world (Heb. 7:23-28).

The most important reason. The high priest entered the Holy of Holies three times: (1) with the incense (vv. 12-14), (2) with blood for his sins, and (3) with blood for the sins of the people. The cloud of incense speaks of the glory of God, which is the whole purpose of redemption (John 17:1; Eph. 1:6, 12, 14).

Scapegoat may come from an Aramaic word that means "to remove." The setting free of the live goat pictured God's forgiveness of their sins (Ps. 103:10-13), but this required the death of the other goat. Salvation is free, but it is not cheap.

LEVITICUS 17

One price. The only price for sin that God will accept is blood, for the blood is the life of the creature. The sacrifice of blood means one life given for another. We should respect all life and not treat the blood as something common. The Jews were not to bring sacrifices of game (v. 13), because those cost them nothing. (See 2 Sam. 24:24.) The animals shed their blood involuntarily, but Jesus gave His life willingly for the sins of the world.

One place. While in the wilderness, the Jews had to do all their slaughtering at the brazen altar and make each animal a peace offering to the Lord. (This law was modified when they entered the land [Deut. 12:20-28].) No other place was acceptable to God. The blood of Jesus Christ, shed at Calvary, is the only acceptable sacrifice for sin in God's sight.

Do you look upon each meal as an offering to the Lord, and do you eat and drink to His glory (1 Cor. 10:31)?

LEVITICUS 18

Standards. God could not accept the moral standards of either Egypt or Canaan, and the Jews were not to follow them.

Instead, they were to obey the laws of God. "I am the LORD" appears twenty-one times in chapters 18 and 19, and the statement reminds us that we are under His authority. (See Rom. 12:2.)

Sexuality. Sex is a wonderful gift of God to the human family. When it is used according to His will, it is creative and brings rich blessing. Used apart from His will, sex is destructive and brings tragic consequences. Illicit sex defiles the persons involved (vv. 20-30), whole nations (v. 24) and the land itself (vv. 25, 27).

Sickness. Sexual perversions are abominable to God and make a nation sick. The nations in Canaan were devoted to such practices, and the land "vomited them out" to make room for God's people. God can forgive sexual sins (1 Cor. 6:9-11), but God warns His people not to practice them (1 Thess. 4:1-8; Heb. 13:4).

LEVITICUS 19

God's command for His people to be holy applies to us today (1 Pet. 1:16). The declaration "I am the LORD," found fifteen times in this chapter, reminds us that He must control every area of life.

The home (3a). Holiness should start in the home as we show respect for our parents (Eph. 6:1-3).

Time (3b). All of our time belongs to God, and we must not waste it (Eph. 5:15-17). But we must also take care to devote special times to Him in worship and service.

Food (5-8). Yes, we must eat and drink to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31). Our table should be an altar for peace offerings, but too often it is a field for battles!

Labor (9-10). We should think of others as we enjoy what God has given to us. If He is Lord in our work, we cannot be selfish.

Business (11-13). Making dishonest deals, telling lies, holding back money, and using God's name to cover frauds are all out of the question when He is Lord.

Neighbors (14-18). Unkindness, injustice, gossip, grudges, and hatred (note the sequence) are evil. "Love your neighbor as yourself" is the second greatest commandment (Mark 12:31).

Read the entire chapter carefully and find other areas of practical application.

LEVITICUS 20

The ominous phrase “put to death” is found nine times in this chapter, for “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). But fear of death is not the highest motive for holy living. “I am the LORD who sanctifies you” (v. 8) ought to be motivation enough (Phil. 2:12–13).

Idolatry (1–5). Molech was the Ammonite god whom the people worshiped by sacrificing their children on the altar or presenting them as temple prostitutes. The modern idols of money, possessions, success, and position have cost many parents their children.

Spiritism (6–8). Idolatry and spiritism go together (1 Cor. 10:19–22). The increasing interest in satanism in our own day is frightening, and no Christian ought to joke about Satan or have anything to do with satanic practices.

Dishonoring parents (9). This verse emphasizes the fifth commandment (Exod. 20:12) and repeats the law given in Exodus 21:17. (See Prov. 20:20; 30:11, 17; 2 Tim. 3:1–4.)

Immorality (10–21). Adultery, incest, homosexuality, and bestiality are condemned, for these things are contrary to nature (Rom. 1:24–27). God created sex and marriage, and we should abide by His laws regarding them.

If Israel allowed these sins, the nation would forfeit its inheritance. (See Eph. 5:5.)

LEVITICUS 21

Privilege always brings responsibility. If the nation was to be sanctified, the spiritual leaders had to set the example. God had a word for the priests (1–9), the high priest (10–15), and those who could not be priests (16–24). Note the admonitions in this chapter.

“Don’t defile yourself” (1, 3, 4, 11). Anyone who touched a dead body was ceremonially unclean, so the priests had to be extra careful. They were expected to mourn, but not like the hopeless pagans (v. 5; see also 1 Thess. 4:13–18).

“Don’t profane God’s name!” (6). If we adopt pagan practices, people think we are worshiping pagan gods, and we dishonor the name of the Lord. “Hallowed be Your name” is the first petition in the Lord’s Prayer (Matt. 6:9).

“Don’t profane My sanctuary!” (12, 23). A defiled or disqualified priest would profane God’s holy sanctuary, and God would have to judge. Holy men must minister in holy courts.

“Don’t profane your posterity!” (15). So special was the high priest that he could not take anyone but a virgin for a wife to assure the nation that his firstborn was truly a descendant of Aaron. Any sons born with physical defects could not serve, but they received their share of the offerings. The priest who offers a faultless sacrifice (Lev. 22:20–25) must himself be faultless. God wants servants today to be blameless (1 Tim. 3:2, 10).

LEVITICUS 22

The chapter begins and ends with the solemn admonition, “You shall not profane My holy name” (vv. 1, 32). In chapter 21, God warned the priests not to be defiled by the unclean things; now He warns them not to defile the clean things.

Defective serving (1–9). It was dangerous for the priests to serve God if they knew they were unclean. They were insulting God, who knows all things, and deceiving the people who depended on them to present their offerings. The prophet Isaiah advised, “Be clean, you who bear the vessels of the LORD” (Isa. 52:11).

Defective sharing (10–16). The priests fed their families from the sacrifices the people brought, and that holy food could not be given to outsiders, not even a house guest. It is good to be generous, but not if our generosity dishonors God’s gifts (Matt. 7:6).

Defective sacrificing (17–33). We must give God the best, for that is what He deserves. Since they pictured the coming Savior, the sacrifices had to be perfect. How easy it is to give to the Lord something we don’t want anymore! Ponder Malachi 1:6–8.

LEVITICUS 23

The Hebrew calendar was organized around a series of sevens. The seventh day of the week was the Sabbath. They celebrated seven annual feasts, three of which occurred in the seventh month. The seventh year was their Sabbatical Year, and after forty-nine years (seven times seven), they celebrated the Year of Jubilee.

The Seven Feasts Picture Salvation History

Passover	<i>Christ, the Lamb, who died for us</i>	<i>John 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:7</i>
Unleavened Bread	<i>The Christian life of fellowship, sep- aration from sin, and feeding on Christ</i>	<i>1 Cor. 5:6-8</i>
Firstfruits	<i>The resurrection of Christ</i>	<i>1 Cor. 15:20-23</i>
Pentecost	<i>The coming of the Holy Spirit</i>	<i>Acts 2:1ff.</i>
Trumpets	<i>The gathering together of God's people</i>	<i>Isa. 27:12-13; Matt. 24:29-31; 1 Thess. 4:13-18</i>
Day of Atonement	<i>The future cleansing of God's people</i>	<i>Zech. 13:1-2; Rom. 14:10</i>
Tabernacles	<i>The future joy of God's people in His kingdom</i>	<i>Zech. 14:16-21</i>

God invites us to remember. Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread reminded them of their miraculous deliver-

ance from Egypt by the mighty hand of God. The Feast of Tabernacles reminded the people that their ancestors had lived in booths during their wanderings. Each new generation must be taught what God has done for His people; otherwise, they may take their blessings for granted. Specific times of remembering can be good for all of us.

God invites us to rejoice. At least three of the seven feasts (Firstfruits, Pentecost, and Tabernacles) were tied to the agricultural life of the people, reminders that God was the Giver of all that they needed and enjoyed.

God invites us to repent. The great Day of Atonement (chap. 16) required the people to confess their sin and trust God for cleansing. It was followed by Tabernacles, a week of joy and feasting. True joy comes only when we know we are right with God (Ps. 51:8, 12).

LEVITICUS 24

Three important responsibilities "before the LORD" (vv. 3, 6, 8) are given in this chapter.

Providing the oil (1-4). Only God and the priests saw the light, but the lamps had to be kept shining, for there was no other source of light in the Holy of Holies. The purest olive oil had to be used, supplied by the people themselves. Do we today, as God's people, help the light of the church to keep shining continually (Rev. 1:20)?

Presenting the bread (5-9). Twelve loaves were put on the table each Sabbath, and then the old loaves were given to the priests to eat. They were a reminder that God fed the twelve tribes both physically and spiritually, and that they in turn were to feed the world the truth about the Lord.

Protecting the name (10-23). The man could not be blamed for his parentage, but he could be blamed for blaspheming. Would someone with Egyptian ancestry glorify Israel's God? (See Exod. 5:2.) Like Moses, we should wait on God for direction (James 1:5). It was a capital offense, and the man was stoned to death. God emphasized again the basic principle that He stated in Exodus 21: equal justice and not personal vengeance.

LEVITICUS 25

Resources. The Sabbatical Year (vv. 1-7) and the Year of Jubilee (vv. 8-55; *jubal* means “to blow a trumpet”) were based on two propositions: “The land is Mine” (v. 23), and “The children of Israel are My servants” (vv. 42; 55). God owns the land; we are stewards of what He has shared with us. We must use His resources wisely for His glory, for one day we must give an account of our stewardship (Luke 16:1ff.).

Rest. There was also an ecological purpose behind these laws, for obedience to them would grant rest to the land, to the beasts who helped work the land, and to the people. Along with the weekly Sabbath, the two events reminded Israel that rest and work go together and that people and God-given resources must not be exploited.

Riches. There was an economic purpose, for God had a concern for the poor and afflicted (vv. 25, 35, 39, 47). Had Israel obeyed the law of the Year of Jubilee, it would have helped to balance the economy, and the rich would have had difficulty exploiting the poor.

Responsibility. But the overriding purpose was spiritual, a reminder that Jehovah was Lord of both the land and the people, and that Israel had the responsibility to trust Him for everything. They could not sow during either the forty-ninth or fiftieth year but had to wait for the harvest of the fifty-first year. That would take faith (vv. 18-22)!

Redemption. Jesus used the Year of Jubilee to picture salvation (Luke 4:16-21). Today He offers rest and freedom to all who will trust Him. We are living now in the Year of Jubilee!

LEVITICUS 26

Covenant (1-13). God used the word *covenant* eight times in this chapter. It reminded the people of their special relationship with Him and the responsibilities belonging to that relationship. If they obeyed the terms of the covenant, they would remain in the Promised Land and enjoy His blessings. God does not promise material success to His new covenant people today, but He does promise to be with us and meet our every need.

Chastening (14-39). God's covenant included both blessing

and chastening, for God will not share His goodness with rebellious children. Enjoying the gifts while insulting the Giver is both selfish and idolatrous. We should obey God, not to “deserve” His blessings or even to avoid His chastenings, but to show our love to Him and our desire to please His heart.

Confession (40–46). A gracious God always leaves the door open for restoration. That is one loving purpose of His chastening hand (Heb. 12:1–13). The people may break their promises to God (v. 15), but God will never break His promises to His people (v. 44). God forgets our sins but remembers His covenant! This is not an excuse for sin, but it is an encouragement for sinners to repent and return to the Lord.

LEVITICUS 27

If you have ever found it difficult or impossible to fulfill a promise, the message of this chapter is for you.

In a moment of extreme joy or trial, a Jew might make a vow to God, offering to give Him something valuable in return for His blessing. (See Judg. 11:29–40; Jon. 2:9.) The vow might involve people (vv. 1–8), animals (vv. 9–13, 26–27), property (vv. 14–25), or produce (vv. 30–33).

If the person could not fulfill the vow, he was not permitted to back out, nor could he offer a cheaper substitute. He had to give the priest the equivalent in money, plus one-fifth more. This chapter tells the priest how to evaluate the gift so that the Lord would receive the right amount, for the money was used for the work of the sanctuary. The word *valuation* is used nineteen times.

Talk is not “cheap”; rash promises can be very expensive. It behooves us to be careful when we experience great joy or great sorrow, lest we make promises to God that we cannot keep. (See Prov. 20:25; Eccles. 5:4–5.) Yes, you can give God something else, but be sure it is equivalent to the original offer—and let Him do the evaluating.

NUMBERS

Numbers gets its name from the numberings of Israel's men of war. The old generation was numbered at Mount Sinai (chaps. 1—4) and the new in the plains of Moab (chaps. 26—27). This is a book of *transition*. God set aside the old generation because of their unbelief (chaps. 1—20) and then prepared a new generation to inherit the Promised Land (chaps. 21—36).

It is a book of *wanderings*, for God made His people wander in the wilderness for forty years until the old generation, twenty years and older, died off. They did not believe God, and their unbelief cost them the inheritance. The New Testament commentary on this event is the book of Hebrews. Unless by faith you enter into your spiritual inheritance in Christ (Eph. 1:3), you will “wander” in unbelief and rob yourself of the blessings God has planned for you (Eph. 2:10).

Bible geography is instructive. Israel in Egypt pictures our lost condition of bondage to the world. Israel in Canaan illustrates our claiming our inheritance by faith and enjoying the fullness of God's provision. Israel in the wilderness pictures carnal Christians whose unbelief and disobedience prevent them from entering into all that God has for them.

NUMBERS 1—2

Genesis pictures God's people as pilgrims and strangers, looking for their inheritance. Exodus and Leviticus depict Israel as a holy nation of priests, worshiping the Lord. The book of Numbers emphasizes God's people as warriors, overcoming the enemy and claiming the promised inheritance.

They counted the men, twenty years and older, who were able to go to war. They did not ask for volunteers. When you enter the family of God by faith in Jesus Christ, you automati-

cally become one of His soldiers (2 Tim. 2:3-4). Every believer is a soldier, either a good one or a bad one.

The army was organized, each tribe with its leaders and its standard. There was unity in diversity. Perhaps the camp of Israel pictures the church. There are different "tribes" and standards, with their different leaders, but it is one army, following one Commander and fighting one enemy: "And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith" (1 John 5:4).

NUMBERS 3—4

The priests were also a part of the battle, for without the blessing of the Lord, there could be no victory. Some of God's people are in the front lines of the battle, while others are behind the lines, interceding to the Lord.

It was important that the tabernacle of the Lord go with the people, so God instructed the priests and Levites exactly how to dismantle it and carry it. Each detail about the Lord's work is significant and must not be left to mere human wisdom.

And each person is vital to the work of the Lord, no matter what task God assigns. No task is trivial, not even taking care of the pegs (3:37). Some Levites had heavier burdens than others, but God had given them the assignments and He would enable them.

The putting up and taking down of the tabernacle were tasks as essential as the offering of the sacrifices or the burning of the incense. Spiritual ministry is no place for idle spectators or careless workers, for it is a matter of life and death (4:17-20).

NUMBERS 5

Defiling (1-4). Not everybody in Israel was a soldier or a priest, but each individual was responsible to please the Lord and keep from defilement. Israel was to be holy to the Lord; otherwise He could not bless the nation with victory. You may not think you are important to the spiritual battles going on in today's world, but you are; and you must keep clean.

Defrauding (5-10). If the soldiers are not loyal to one another, how can they defeat the enemy? It was not enough to

confess the sin; there had to be restitution as well. The people were also reminded to care for the priests because their ministry was important to the victory. Again, each individual had to be sure he or she was obedient to the Lord.

Discovering (11-31). This unusual law protected the woman as well as sanctified the marriage relationship. Husbands and wives must be faithful to each other. Marriage is an intimate relationship, and even *hidden* unfaithfulness can create a spirit of jealousy and doubt. If the wife was guilty, the truth would come out; if not, the husband could trust her, and they could live together and have a family. We have no such laws today, but we have an all-seeing God to whom we will answer one day.

NUMBERS 6

Separation (1-12). *Nazirite* comes from a word that means "to dedicate." Nazirites were men and women dedicated to the Lord, either for a brief period or for a lifetime (Judg. 13:1-5). Their separation was twofold: *to* the Lord (v. 2) and *from* what defiled (vv. 3-8). Even little things could defile, like the seeds and skins of grapes! When God says something is wrong, it is wrong, no matter how small a thing it may seem to be.

Termination (13-21). The Nazirite stated at the beginning how long the vow would last, but our separation to the Lord must be for life. However, it is not wrong occasionally to set aside periods of time for special devotion to the Lord, just as the Nazirites did. If the Nazirite became defiled, all the days of the dedication were lost (v. 12). It is a costly thing to disobey the Lord. Even though the Nazirite had lived in dedication, it was still necessary to bring sacrifices to the Lord, for nobody is perfect before Him.

Benediction (22-27). What a privilege it was for the priests to bless the people, and what a privilege it is for us to share God's blessing with others. He blesses us so that we may be a blessing (Gen. 12:1-3). The people were about to enter into war, yet God told them how to have peace. No matter how trying your circumstances may be, you can have God's peace as you live under the blessing of His smile.

NUMBERS 7

The longest chapter in Numbers deals with a generous offering brought by the leaders of the tribes just after the tabernacle was set up. Leaders certainly ought to set the example in giving, and those men did.

The gifts were identical, presented on twelve successive days; and yet in God's eyes, the gifts were individual. If what we give is from the heart, presented for God's glory, He sees it, and He will reward in His own time. Each of those twelve leaders was precious to God. He received their gifts individually.

The gifts were practical, to be used for the service of the tabernacle. When we supply ministry tools for God's servants, we also bring gifts to the Lord.

Everybody but the Kohathites could use the carts for their work. The sons of Kohath had to carry the tabernacle furniture on their shoulders (3:30-31; 4:15). Although there are some burdens others can help us bear, "each one shall bear his own load" (Gal. 6:1-5). David disobeyed this law and brought judgment from God (2 Sam. 6:1-15). Don't refuse the burdens; God will enable you to carry them.

NUMBERS 8

Not everybody is called to be a priest or a leader. Some are called to be helpers, such as the Levites. The gift of helps (1 Cor. 12:28) is important in God's work and must never be despised. God considered the Levites as His gift to Aaron (v. 19). We should be thankful for those God gives to help us in our work.

Substitutes. The Levites were first of all given to the Lord as substitutes for all the firstborn in Israel (vv. 16-18; 3:11-13). The firstborn belonged to God, but He allowed them to be redeemed (Exod. 13:1, 11-13). You have your work to do for Christ, but don't forget those who represent you as they serve the Lord in different places.

Servants. The Levites were given to Aaron as workers (vv. 11, 19). They could not do all that the priests did, but they had their tasks and were expected to fulfill them faithfully.

Sacrifices. They were presented to God as "living sacri-

fices," wave offerings to the Lord (vv. 11, 13, 15, 21). No matter what work you do for the Lord, it should be like offering up a sacrifice of worship to Him (Phil. 4:10-20).

NUMBERS 9

God teaches us in different ways. There are *commandments to obey* (vv. 1-5), and we must know them and do them. Passover was the annual reminder that God had redeemed Israel from bondage and they belonged to Him. Think of the thousands of lambs that were slain so that the people might obey God! Think of the Lamb of God who died for the whole world (John 1:29)!

There are also *exceptions to consider* (vv. 6-14). The legalist makes no exceptions, and the anarchist makes everything an exception; but the child of God waits on the Lord for His orders. Each problem in life is an opportunity to learn how to wait on God and discover His will. Let's not fear exceptions. Our job is to be obedient even if what we do does not always appear to be consistent.

The Will of God

Never be afraid of the will of God; God's will is the expression of God's love, and it comes from His heart (Ps. 33:11). It is food, not medicine (John 4:31-34), and nourishes us as we obey. Oswald Chambers was correct when he said, "Doing God's will is never hard. The only thing that is hard is not doing His will." Are you doing His will now?

There are *leadings to follow* (vv. 15-23). Note the sequence: obeying the Lord, waiting on the Lord, following the Lord. God has His times and His routes, and we must watch for His leading. Perhaps the most difficult time for us is when God tarries and we have to wait (v. 19). It is also the most dangerous time,

for human nature wants to rush ahead. We must “rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him” (Ps. 37:7).

NUMBERS 10

The people of Israel were to set out for their God-appointed inheritance. They would go through an unknown land that was dangerous, but God gave them the help they needed.

His command (1–13). The priests used the two silver trumpets to communicate God’s will to the people. The blowing of the silver trumpets would gather them together, move them forward, summon them to battle, or call them to enjoy the feasts of the Lord. They heard the trumpets and watched the cloud, and they were safe.

His word (14–28). God had already told them how to organize the march, and all they had to do was obey. If we don’t obey in the things God has told us, He will not reveal anything new to us (John 7:17).

Experience (29–32). Hobab was a brother of Zipporah, Moses’ wife; and Moses asked him to come with Israel and share his “wilderness wisdom.” Hobab’s wisdom did not take the place of God’s leading. Rather, Hobab assisted in the everyday problems of a people who were not accustomed to wilderness life. God promises to guide us, but that doesn’t mean we should be deaf to the wisdom of experienced people. Hobab did Israel good, and Israel brought good to him (Judg. 1:16; 4:11).

Prayer (33–36). The ark represented God’s presence and His throne. Moses prayed to God when the people marched forward and when God told them to stop. That’s a good example for us to follow as we move through each day.

NUMBERS 11

This is a chapter of complaining!

Complaining about bread (1–9). God was leading them, so the people had all they needed; yet they complained again. (See Phil. 2:14–15.) Their grumbling was evidence of the unbelief that would keep them out of the Promised Land. Had they been grateful for God’s goodness and obedient to God’s guidance, they would have saved themselves a great deal of mis-

ery. Let's remember that the next time we are tempted to complain about the providence of God. "The slaves of sin rarely grumble at that slavery; it is their slavery to God they grumble at," said George MacDonald.

Complaining about burdens (10-25). Moses was grieved when they criticized both him and God. Could they improve upon the manna that came from heaven? Why did they crave food from Egypt? Had they forgotten their bondage in that land? Moses did what you must do when people disappoint you: he took it to God in prayer and told God just how he felt. God met the need, encouraged His servant, and punished the rebels.

Complaining about blessing (26-35). Zealous for Moses and his position, Joshua told him to stop the two men from prophesying. James and John made a similar mistake, and Jesus had to rebuke them (Luke 9:49-50). If all of God's people were praising God by the Spirit, they would not be complaining! The Jews got what they asked for, but they lost the spiritual enrichment that comes when people walk by faith (Ps. 106:15). Have you learned to be grateful for *unanswered* prayer?

NUMBERS 12

The leader denounced (1-3). If you are in a place of leadership, expect criticism, even from members of your family. It happened to Moses, David (2 Sam. 6:20-23), and the Lord Jesus (Mark 3:20-21). Moses' wife was not the real reason for their criticism. Aaron and his sister were jealous of the authority God had given Moses, and they wanted him to share it. Perhaps they were reacting to what God did for the seventy elders (chap. 11).

The Lord displeased (4-10). Moses did not defend himself; he waited for God to act. If we defend ourselves, we may hinder the Lord from defending us. Next to death, becoming a leper was the worst thing that could have happened to Miriam.

The nation delayed (11-16). How often people turn for help to the very ones they have criticized! In his meekness, Moses did not rejoice at his sister's punishment; instead, he prayed for her (Matt. 5:43-48). Because of their sin, Aaron and Miriam

delayed the march of the nation for a whole week. The sin of criticism is far more serious than most people realize (Matt. 7:1-5; James 4:12).

NUMBERS 13

Seeing the opportunities (1-25). The people thought they should spy out the land before conquering it, and Moses let them do it (Deut. 1:19-25). God had already told them what the Promised Land was like, so why did they have to investigate? Faith takes God at His word and needs no other evidence (Heb. 11:1). The spies discovered that the land was indeed all that God had promised it to be.

Seeing the obstacles (26-33). Ten spies emphasized the obstacles instead of the opportunities and concluded that Israel was too weak to conquer the enemy. They walked by sight and not by faith. The people of the land were giants, the city walls were high, and the men felt like grasshoppers! Unbelief blinds you to God's greatness and magnifies your own weakness.

Seeing the Lord (30). Caleb was a man of faith who didn't worry about the size of the problem because he trusted a great God. The important question in life is not, "How big is the problem?" or "How big am I?" The major question is, "How big is my God?" The Lord saw the Canaanites as grasshoppers (Isa. 40:22), but the unbelieving spies were not looking at the situation from God's point of view. When you walk by faith, the future is your friend, and every enemy is defeated.

NUMBERS 14

The report of the majority of the spies brought about a destructive chain reaction in the camp of Israel.

Unbelief led to rebellion (1-10). The people wept, complained, looked back to Egypt, wanted a new leader, and even threatened to stone Caleb and Joshua. Such are the evidences of unbelief. Faith looks ahead with courage; unbelief looks back with complaint. Faith unites the people of God; unbelief looks for somebody to blame. There was still time to repent and seek God's face, but the people refused to listen to Caleb and Joshua.

Rebellion led to intercession (11-19). Moses once again

stood between God's people and God's judgment and turned down God's offer to make him the founder of a new nation (Exod. 32). Moses interceded for the people on the basis of the character and glory of God.

Intercession led to pardon (20-38). God pardoned the people, but at the same time He judged their sins (Gal. 6:7-8). The ten spies died in a plague, and the nation was consigned to forty years of wandering until the people who were twenty years old or older died. Faith brings life, but unbelief brings defeat and death.

Pardon led to presumption (39-45). The people had acted stubbornly like the mule, and now they acted impetuously like the horse (Ps. 32:9). God forgives us that we might fear Him (Ps. 130:4), not that we might tempt Him. The flesh can never accomplish what only faith can do. (See Deut. 1:41-44.)

When You Are Outnumbered

Caleb and Joshua were a minority on the Search Committee and yet they did not give in, even when the nation turned against them and their lives were in danger. They had faith in God, they knew God's will for the people, and they stood their ground. It is not important that we please others, but it is important that we please God. Like Caleb and Joshua, sometimes we must suffer because of the sins of others; but in the end, God will vindicate those who trust Him. (See Acts 20:24; 1 Cor. 15:58.)

NUMBERS 15

Assurance (1-21). God gave the people a word of assurance when He said, "*When you have come into the land*" (italics

added). In spite of the nation's sins, the new generation would make it to Canaan and possess the land. (See 2 Tim. 2:11-13.) When they did, they were expected to take time to thank God and worship Him. Do you pause to thank God for sharing His blessings with you?

Obedience (22-29). God made provision for the forgiveness of unintentional sins. Of course, innocent animals had to die to provide forgiveness, just as Jesus had to die to make our cleansing possible.

Arrogance (30-36). In His law, God made no provision for presumptuous sin, for such sinners were despising God's Word and defying His authority. God in His mercy could forgive such sins, as He did with David (2 Sam. 12), but He did not put Himself under obligation. The man who deliberately violated the Sabbath discovered that God is not mocked.

Remembrance (37-41). The tassels were small things, yet they carried a big message: Israel belonged to God and must respect and obey His commandments. It is not wrong to have reminders that point us to God, provided they don't replace God or His Word. We are to "seek those things which are above" (Col. 3:1).

NUMBERS 16

A successful leader is often accused of exalting himself, especially by those who are jealous of him and want to take his place. It is true that all of God's people are set apart by Him and for Him, but it is also true that God calls some of His people to be leaders in special places of service. Without leadership, we would have chaos.

Leaders often get blamed for things they did not do (vv. 12-14). Moses wanted to lead the nation into their inheritance, but the unbelief of the people kept them out. It is easier for rebels to find a scapegoat than to confess their own sins. They said that *Egypt* was a "land flowing with milk and honey." Their statement showed where their hearts really were.

The opposition was impressive: 250 leaders, all united against Moses. But Moses was not intimidated; he took the matter to the Lord and let Him be the judge. God will vindicate His servants better than they can vindicate themselves. Once again, the love and intercession of Moses saved the very

people who had created problems for him. (See Rom. 12:14-21.)

Nearly fifteen thousand people died because of four men who wanted to promote themselves. That danger is still with us, and we must heed Proverbs 16:18; 18:12; and 1 Peter 5:5-6.

NUMBERS 17

God had disciplined the people because of their murmuring and rebelling, but the problem was not yet solved. One of Israel's besetting sins was *murmuring* (1 Cor. 10:10), a sin that we must avoid today (Phil. 2:14).

Complaining

God's people are commanded not to complain (Phil. 2:14); therefore, complaining is a sin. When we complain, we give evidence of unbelief in our hearts and lack of gratitude toward God. If we were truly "giving thanks always for all things" (Eph. 5:20), we would not be complaining. The best way to overcome a complaining spirit is to accept God's will by faith and thank Him for His goodness, even if we don't see anything good happening. Romans 8:28 is still there for us to claim!

Korah, a Levite, was not satisfied to serve in the tabernacle according to God's will; he wanted a "promotion" so he could enjoy all the privileges of the priests. It is good to desire spiritual growth and progress, but we must beware selfish ambition that glorifies the servant and not the Master (Phil. 2:3-4). "Selfish ambition" is one of the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:20), and it brings destruction.

God vindicated His servants by bringing *death* to some of their opponents and by giving *life* to Aaron's rod. By the power of God, the dead rod produced beauty and fruit. Spiritual leadership will be recognized by its life and fruitfulness, which come from being in the Holy of Holies with God.

How unpredictable is human nature! One day, the people wanted to serve in the tabernacle; the next day, they were afraid to get near it! They did not sincerely fear God; they feared only His judgment. They *needed* leadership far more than they realized.

NUMBERS 18

The emphasis in this chapter is on *gifts*. God gives *helpers* (v. 6) to assist us in our work, and we must accept them and be grateful for them. Some of the Levites had rebelled against Moses and Aaron, but God still gave them the privilege of serving Him and helping the priests.

God gives us *work to do* (v. 7). If we are in the will of God, our work is a divine vocation, and we must do it for His glory.

God gives us *what we need* (v. 8ff.). He fed the priests from the sacrifices brought to the altar and also from the tithes (v. 21). His action reminds us that "the laborer is worthy of his wages" (Luke 10:7; 1 Cor. 9:14; 1 Tim. 5:18).

God gives us *Himself* (v. 20). The priests and Levites were assigned places to live in Israel, but they did not have property from which they could get income (Josh. 13:14). They had to trust God to meet their needs. But when God is your inheritance, what more do you need? (See Ps. 16:5-6.)

NUMBERS 19

As a holy and separated people, the Jews had to avoid ritual uncleanness of all kinds, especially contamination from dead bodies. No doubt there were hygienic purposes behind this law, but it also reminded the people to avoid sin because of the defilement it brings. God dwelt in the camp and no one was to defile it. The application for today is found in 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1.

God made provision for restoring persons who became de-

filed. Blood had to be shed, for the heifer was a sin offering (v. 9). The ashes from the sacrifice were ceremonially clean and were used to make “water of purification.” The defiled person could be ceremonially cleansed by obeying God’s instructions and using the water of purification.

Water for washing is a picture of the Word of God (John 15:3; Eph. 5:25–27). The Word promises us cleansing because the blood of God’s Son was shed for us on the cross (1 John 1:5–2:2). The Word also provides cleansing for the inner person as we read it, meditate on it, and apply it to our lives.

Why should we be defiled and defile others when God’s gracious cleansing is available?

NUMBERS 20

Leaders are often discouraged as they go through one trial after another. First, Miriam died, and Moses and Aaron mourned their only sister. Then the people began to complain again, for Egypt was still in their hearts. In the will of God, no place is an “evil place”; but when your inner desires are not spiritual, no place is a good place—except Egypt!

Leaders sometimes disobey God, as Moses did when he was angered by the people (Ps. 106:32–33). Water for drinking is a picture of the Holy Spirit (John 7:37–39), and the rock is a symbol of Christ (1 Cor. 10:4). Christ was smitten on the cross for us that we might receive the gift of the Spirit. He died but once, so Moses should not have smitten the rock again. Instead, he should have spoken to the rock.

Leaders are disciplined by God, for with privilege goes responsibility. Neither Moses nor Aaron was permitted to enter the Promised Land, although Moses was allowed to see the land from afar (Deut. 3:21–29).

Leaders are sometimes disappointed. Edom would not permit Israel to pass through the land despite the promises Moses gave. The Edomites were the descendants of Esau, Jacob’s brother, and were therefore blood relatives to Israel; but they did not act like brethren.

It is not easy to be a leader, and we must pray for those whom God has made leaders in His service.

NUMBERS 21

In the journeys of life, God can meet every need.

God gives victory. The nation of Israel was on the move as God gave the people one victory after another over strong kings and armies. Israel could have had this experience *in Canaan* had they trusted God and entered the land. These battles helped to train the younger men for the time when they would conquer Canaan.

God gives healing. Israel murmured not about the battles but about their lack of food and water in the wilderness. It was the old "Egyptian appetite" asserting itself again. Instead of meeting the need immediately, God first disciplined the people until they cried out for help. Jesus used the uplifted brazen serpent to picture His own death on the cross (John 3:14-16). He became the very thing that was killing us—*sin* (2 Cor. 5:21). And the only way to be saved is to look to Christ by faith.

God gives water. This time the water did not come from a rock, for God is not limited to one way of meeting our needs. He provided a well for them in a miraculous way. This shows the grace and goodness of the Lord, for just a short time before, the people had complained about the way He was leading them. Give thanks for Psalm 103:10 and Philippians 4:19!

NUMBERS 22

The reports of Israel's victories brought fear to Balak. He knew that the army of Israel could never be defeated by human means because the Jews were *God's* people and the battle was a spiritual one. That is why he asked Balaam to curse the nation. Our battle today is not against flesh and blood but against spiritual wickedness, and we will win the victory only if we use spiritual weapons (Eph. 6:10-18; 2 Cor. 10:3-6).

Balaam was a hireling prophet who finally succumbed to the pressure of greater honor and more money. He was willing to look at things "from another viewpoint" in hopes he could find a loophole in the revealed will of God. It is a dangerous thing to bargain over the will of God. Using one's gifts to make money is "the way of Balaam" (2 Pet. 2:15-16), a sin that God condemns.

Thomas Merton has said that “the greatest evil is found where the greatest good has been corrupted.” And Paul warned, “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil” (1 Tim. 6:10). Balaam and Judas Iscariot know how true this is!

NUMBERS 23

God did not shut Balaam’s mouth. He let him speak, *but He turned the curse into a blessing* (Neh. 13:2). Whenever you feel that people and circumstances are cursing you, remember what God did for Israel, and trust Him (Rom. 8:28).

Balaam’s descriptions of Israel remind us of the privileges we have as the children of God. We are *safe* (v. 8; Rom. 8:31–39) because we are *separated from the world* (v. 9; John 17:14–16) and belong to the Lord who never lies (v. 19). We have *strength* like an ox (v. 22) and a lioness (v. 24).

Balaam wanted very much to die the death of the righteous (v. 10), but he did not want to live the life of the righteous. Read Psalm 37:37, Proverbs 14:32, and Revelation 14:13, and contrast Paul’s testimony in Philippians 1:19–23.

NUMBERS 24

Balak could not silence Balaam no matter how he tried. In his third oracle (vv. 1–9), Balaam saw Israel in Canaan, conquering their enemies and enjoying their inheritance. His statement in verse 9 about blessing and cursing reminds us of God’s covenant with Abraham (Gen. 12:3). Balaam was actually condemning himself when he spoke. God does not defend His people’s sins, but He always defends His people, for they are dear to Him.

In his fourth oracle (vv. 15–24), Balaam saw Israel’s future glory in the coming of the Messiah (v. 17). God used a covetous prophet to give a beautiful picture of the Savior and the victories He would win.

Satan and his followers do their best to curse God’s people today. However, through it all, God’s grace still works, God’s people are still blessed, and God’s name is glorified, for God can turn the curse into a blessing.

NUMBERS 25—26

Balaam could not destroy Israel with his curses, but he could defile Israel with his counsel. He seduced the Jews into disobeying God by suggesting that Balak invite Israel to the religious feasts of the Moabites (31:16). There the Jews quickly fell into sin.

Moses had commanded the people to separate themselves from the nations around them and to avoid their abominable religious practices (Exod. 34:10–17). Israel abandoned its special position (Num. 23:9) and compromised with sin. The result? Twenty-four thousand Jews died from a plague God sent to the camp.

It was not Moses, the leader, or Eleazer, the high priest, who stopped the plague, but Phinehas, the son of Eleazer. His devotion to the Lord brought him a special commendation and reward from the Lord. (See Ps. 106:28–31.)

God's people must beware compromising with the enemy (2 Cor. 6:14–18). If Satan does not succeed as the devouring lion (1 Pet. 5:8), he will come as the deceiving serpent (2 Cor. 11:3).

The taking of the second census was a sign that the nation's wanderings were soon to end. Note the people in this list who are given special attention: Dathan and Abiram, who rebelled against the Lord (26:9–11); Nadab and Abihu, who defied the Lord (26:61); and Joshua and Caleb, who believed the Lord (26:65).

NUMBERS 27

Claiming the land (1–11). New problems give us new opportunities to seek God's wisdom and learn new truths: "Yet you do not have because you do not ask" (James 4:2). The five daughters had the courage and faith to ask for their inheritance, and they got it. They also had a part in establishing a law that helped other families in Israel get their inheritance.

Seeing the land (12–14). Moses saw the Promised Land but (as far as we know) did not enter it until he appeared with Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1–8). The land of Canaan is a picture, not of heaven but of the believer's inheritance in Christ in the heavenlies (Eph. 1:3). A whole generation

died and never saw the land. Ten of the spies saw the land for forty days and then died in their unbelief. Moses saw the land but could not enter it. The new generation, along with Caleb and Joshua, entered the land and claimed their promised inheritance. To which group do you belong?

Conquering the land (15–23). As always, Moses' greatest concern was the people and not himself, and God gave him his assistant Joshua to be his successor (Matt. 25:21). Joshua was God's general who would conquer the land and give the people their inheritance. He is a type of Jesus Christ (*Joshua* means "Jehovah is salvation") who conquered our enemies for us and opened the way for us to claim all the blessings God has for us.

NUMBERS 28—29

The new generation had to be taught the "religious calendar," which would govern their lives after they entered the land. The older generation should see to it that those coming after understand the traditions. They were instructed about the regular offerings and also about the annual feasts. (See Lev. 23.)

All time belongs to God, but it is good for us to set aside special times to remind us of what He has done for us. The Jews presented their worship at the the beginning of each day (28:1–8), at the end of the week (28:9–10), and on the first of the month (28:11–15). We do not bring animal sacrifices. Instead, we present our bodies to the Lord as "living sacrifices" (Rom. 12:1–2).

The special annual feasts could not take the place of the regular offerings. The way to become more spiritual is to strengthen the regular worship day after day, and then the special times of worship will do us more good. Never neglect the "regular burnt offering" (28:3). The word *regular* is used seventeen times in Numbers 28–29, a reminder that the daily routine is important to God and to us.

NUMBERS 30

The power of words. God takes our promises and pledges seriously, and so should we (Ps. 50:14; Eccles. 5:4–5). If we

promise God that we will do something, or not do something, we must keep our word. We must also recognize that *willing* and *doing* are two different things (Rom. 7:18–25). We need the wisdom of God in making our promises and the power of God in keeping them (Phil. 2:12–13). Words are powerful things and must be used carefully. The Quakers say, “Of your unspoken words, you are the master; of your spoken words, the servant; of your written words, the slave.”

The power of authority. God acknowledges the presence of authority. A wife’s vow may be canceled by her husband and a daughter’s vow by her father. The wife and the daughter should consider this before making promises to God. Although Moses does not instruct the man of the house this way, certainly the husband and father would want to consider the whole family before making any promises to God.

The power of silence. If the father or the husband says nothing, this is considered to be approval of the vow. Silence can sometimes be more powerful than words and have much greater consequences. (See Ps. 141:3.)

NUMBERS 31

The last battle Moses directed was against the Midianites who, at Balaam’s suggestion, had seduced Israel into both idolatry and immorality (chap. 25). Each tribe sent one thousand soldiers, and the high priest went before the army with the ark of the covenant. It was God’s battle, and He would give victory.

Balaam did not have long to enjoy whatever rewards Balak gave him because he was killed in the battle (v. 8). Alas, he did not “die the death of the righteous” (23:10)! As Mark wrote, “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?” (Mark 8:36).

Israel won the war but almost lost the victory, for the leaders brought some Midianite women into the camp along with the spoils. Incomplete obedience always leads to further temptation. (See 1 Sam. 15.) If we do not defeat the enemy, the enemy will defeat us.

They had fought a “holy war,” but the army was defiled in the slaying of the Midianites. They had to purify themselves and the spoils to be clean before God (chap. 19). Some of the

spoils were cleansed by fire. The Lord wants clean soldiers as well as conquering soldiers.

NUMBERS 32

Some people choose to live on the border of God's blessing. They make their decisions on the basis of material gain and not spiritual blessing. The two and a half tribes did not claim their inheritance in Canaan, though they were very close to it.

They assured Moses that they would help conquer the land, but the tribes still brought division to Israel. In fact, when the land was fully conquered, the two and a half tribes had to put up an altar to let people know, "We belong to Israel!" (See Josh. 22.) Had they gone over the Jordan and claimed their inheritance, everybody would have known their citizenship.

"Do not take us over the Jordan!" (v. 5) is as much an expression of failure as "Take us back to the land of Egypt!" or "Let us die in the wilderness!" When material gain, not the glory of God, governs our decisions, we will make the wrong decisions. (See Ps. 47:4.)

NUMBERS 33

Reviewing the past (1-49). Dr. A. T. Pierson said, "History is His story." It is good to review the past and discern the hand of the Lord at work. God delivered them from Egypt and brought them to Sinai, where they entered into a covenant with Him (vv. 1-15). Then He brought them to the border of the Promised Land, where they refused to go in (vv. 16-36). They wandered for forty years and then ended up on the plains of Moab (vv. 37-49). Unbelief means wasted time, wasted lives, and wasted opportunities, but God is gracious and long-suffering with His people.

Anticipating the future (50-56). "When you have crossed the Jordan into the land of Canaan" was a word of promise and assurance that would encourage the nation in their new venture of faith. What a privilege to claim their God-given inheritance! But God also gave some responsibilities: drive out the enemy, destroy their idols, dispossess the people, and then

divide the land. First you conquer, then you claim. First the obedience, then the blessing.

NUMBERS 34

God assigned the tribes their inheritance and set their boundaries, but He used human leaders to do it. What a privilege it is to help people claim their inheritance from God!

We must accept what God assigns to us and not complain or covet what others possess. Some land fronted on wilderness (v. 3), and other portions faced the Great Sea (v. 6). Some tribes had mountains in their territory. Like Canaan, the Christian life is "a land of hills and valleys" (Deut. 11:11), and our God is a God of both the hills and the valleys (1 Kings 20:23ff.). He knows what is best for us, and He is always with us.

When you are tempted to complain about what God has assigned to you, ponder John 3:27 and 1 Corinthians 4:7; 12:4-7, 11. Through faith in Christ, we can be content with our lot (Phil. 4:11-13).

NUMBERS 35

Residence. The fact that the Levites were servants of God did not make them any less citizens of the land. They needed places to live and care for their families when they were not ministering at the tabernacle. The tribes' provision of forty-eight cities for them was done in a fair way (v. 8). God's people should care for God's work and should share as God has provided for them (2 Cor. 8:1-15).

Refuge. Six of the Levitical cities were designated cities of refuge. God makes a distinction between murder and manslaughter, the intentional and the accidental. In that day, the nation had no police force to investigate crimes and prosecute criminals, so the innocent had to be protected from angry family members who might want to take justice into their own hands. In the city of refuge, the fugitive was safe until the congregation decided whether he was guilty of murder or not (Deut. 19:11-13).

Redemption. Jesus Christ is our "city of refuge" (Heb. 6:18).

When we trust Him, our sins are all forgiven and judgment is past (Rom. 8:1). Salvation is not probation. If the fugitive left the city, he was in danger of death. In Jesus Christ, we have eternal life (John 5:24). Our High Priest will never die; therefore, we are saved eternally (Heb. 7:23-28).

NUMBERS 36

Moses had already decreed that a man's inheritance must go to his daughters if he had no sons (27:1-11), but that did not completely solve the problem. Some men of the tribe of Manasseh (Zelophehad's tribe) had discussed and pondered the matter and were concerned about the distribution of their tribal land. What if the daughters married into other tribes? Would the inheritance eventually be confused or even lost?

It is good to think about decisions and see their practical ramifications in everyday life. It is good to think about the future and ask, "What may happen?"

The simple solution was to require the women who inherit property to marry only within their own family clan. It is good to inherit wealth, but with the inheritance may come restrictions and responsibilities. If we want the one, we must accept the other. The daughters of Zelophehad married their cousins, so the inheritance remained intact.

DEUTERONOMY

Deuteronomy means “second law.” It records the second giving of the Law by Moses as he prepared the nation to enter their promised inheritance. But Moses did more than simply repeat the Law to a new generation. He applied it to their new life in the land and stressed the importance of their loving God and obeying Him from the heart.

Some key words in Deuteronomy are *land* (190 times), *hear* (54 times), *possess* and *possession* (57 times), *heart* (53 times), and *love* (25 times).

The nation *owned* the land by God’s grace and *possessed* the land by God’s power, but they could not *enjoy* the land unless they obeyed God’s Word. When the nation disobeyed, God chastened them *in the land* (book of Judges) and then took them *from the land* into Babylonian captivity.

In the addresses, Moses first reminded the people of God’s past leading (chaps. 1–4). The word *remember* is used 14 times in the book. Then he restated and applied the Law (chaps. 5–26), and closed his message with words of warning and blessing (chaps. 27–33). In chapter 34, we read how Moses passed from the scene and Joshua took over.

DEUTERONOMY 1

The Kadesh Barnea event is recorded in Numbers 14, and the New Testament commentary is in Hebrews 3–4. God warns against “an evil heart of unbelief” (Heb. 3:12). An *evil* heart! Why is the sin of unbelief so evil?

To begin with, unbelief makes God a liar and questions the dependability of His Word. Our responsibility is not to question God but to believe God and do what He commands.

Unbelief wastes time. An eleven-day journey turned into

forty years of wandering and death! Unbelief robs us of God's best blessings. God cared for His people those forty years, but how much more He would have done had they claimed their inheritance.

When you come to those Kadesh Barnea places in your pilgrimage, don't look around at the problems and dangers. Look up to the God who is leading you, and walk by faith.

DEUTERONOMY 2

God assigns our battles. He instructed the nation not to meddle with the Edomites, the Moabites, or the Ammonites. The people were to behave themselves as godly pilgrims and avoid creating trouble. For a nation that enjoyed great victory in war, His instructions were probably hard to take, but God had better things for His people than the spoils of those nations. (See Rom. 12:18; Col. 4:5.) It is unwise to meddle in things that God commands us to avoid.

God assures our victory. When the Lord leads us into battle, we need not fear, for His commandment is His enablement. Israel defeated Sihon, and "there was not one city too strong" (v. 36) for God's people. (See 1 John 5:1-4.)

God assigns our inheritance. God promised to give the Trans-Jordan territory to the tribes of Reuben and Gad (Num. 32), and He kept His promise. (See Ps. 47:4; Acts 20:32; 1 Pet. 1:3-5.) God promises—we possess by faith!

DEUTERONOMY 3

A possession to claim (1-11). Guided by God's will and fortified by God's promises, the people marched from victory to victory. Were it not for their unbelief, the former generation could have won the victories in Canaan forty years earlier. The high walls and gates were no problem to God (Num. 13:26-33). He is limited only by our unbelief.

A promise to keep (12-22). The tribes to be settled east of the Jordan had promised to cross the river and help conquer Canaan (Num. 32:16-23). Now that their land was subdued, Reuben and Gad might have settled down and avoided a lot of danger, but they kept their word. God hears our promises and takes them seriously (Num. 30:2; Eccles. 5:1-5).

A penalty to endure (23–29). Because of his pride at Kadesh (Num. 20:1–13), Moses was not allowed to enter Canaan, even though he prayed earnestly for God to relent. He did see the land and give the people a leader to take them into the land. He also visited the land centuries later when Jesus was transfigured (Matt. 17:1–3). Some of the disappointments of life will have their compensations when the glory comes. Be patient!

DEUTERONOMY 4

Before he repeated the Law to Israel, Moses reminded them of their holy relationship with God and of their privileges as His chosen people. What other nation had heard the voice of God, had seen His power and glory, and had received His Word as their wisdom and their very life (vv. 1, 4, 25, 40)? When we take our blessings for granted, we are in danger of disobeying God.

On the basis of these privileges, Moses warned them to *take heed* lest they forget what God had done for them (v. 9), how God had come to them (v. 15), what God had said to them (v. 19), and what God expected of them because of His covenant (v. 23). To whom much is given, much shall be required.

He also warned them that disobedience would bring chastening. God forgives His people when they repent (vv. 29–31), but read Hebrews 12:25–29 before making plans to disobey God. He is a merciful God (v. 31), but He is also a jealous God (v. 24); He will not permit His children to sin successfully.

DEUTERONOMY 5

God's people have three responsibilities when it comes to His commandments: hear them, learn them, and do them (v. 1). When we read the Word of God, we should hear the voice of God as the Spirit speaks to us personally. We must allow the Spirit to teach us God's truth and then empower us to obey it. The blessing comes in the *living* of the Word and not in the *learning* (James 1:21–25).

Most of Deuteronomy is an explanation and application of the commandments repeated here. God's laws are clear and simple; man's laws are complex. As we walk in love, we fulfill God's law in the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:1–4; 13:8–10).

Beware a mere outward obedience to the laws of God (Matt. 5:20ff.). We must have a true fear of God in our hearts as well as a love for Him (vv. 28–29). “Hear” and “fear” are not contradictory commands; in fact, they belong together (Deut. 4:10).

DEUTERONOMY 6

Verse 4 is called “the Shema,” from the Hebrew word for “hear.” The devout Jew recites it several times a day to affirm his faith in Jehovah. The worship of foreign gods was always a threat to Israel, and this statement of faith reminded the Jews that Jehovah is the true and living God who alone deserves worship and obedience. (See 1 John 5:21.)

We must love the Lord with *all* our hearts by keeping *all* His Word *all* the days of our lives (v. 2). He cannot accept half-hearted worship or obedience (Eph. 6:6; 1 John 5:3).

How do we show our love to Him? By hearing and obeying His Word and by sharing it with others. If we love God, His truth will be a part of our normal daily conversation. We also show our love to Him by appreciating His blessings. Times of prosperity become times of temptation if we receive the gifts but fail to thank the Giver (vv. 10–15). (See Phil. 4:11–13; James 1:17.)

DEUTERONOMY 7

Israel had experienced the wrath of God when they allowed themselves to be seduced by the Moabites (Num. 25). Now they were entering a land where they would be surrounded by pagan worship. There could be no compromise. If the nation were defiled by the awful sins of the Canaanites, it would jeopardize the fulfilling of God’s promise of the Savior. Israel had to be a separated people if they were to bless the whole world (Gen. 12:1–3).

Moses gives us some motives for personal obedience. To begin with, God has commanded us (vv. 1–5), and we belong to Him (vv. 6–8). He is faithful (vv. 9–11); what He promises, He will fulfill (vv. 12–26).

Believers today must maintain a separated position (2 Cor.

6:14-18; 1 John 2:15-17) while at the same time loving the lost and seeking to win them to Christ. How do we demolish the strongholds of the enemy? Read 2 Corinthians 10:1-6 and Ephesians 6:10-20.

DEUTERONOMY 8

If we will trust Him, God will bring us out (v. 14), lead us through (v. 15), and bring us in (v. 7). Whatever He starts, He finishes (Ps. 138:8; Phil. 1:6).

As He guides us, God tests us. He tests us by His Word (v. 1). Will we hear *every* word that He speaks, and will we obey? He also tests us by His ways (vv. 2-9), putting us into situations that help us to know our own hearts. When we become proud, God has to humble us. When we neglect His Word, He must remind us that His Word is our very life.

God tests us by His wealth (vv. 10-20). If we love Him and feed on His Word, we will rejoice in Him and not just in His gifts. In times of prosperity, it is easy to forget the Lord who makes it possible for us to work and earn wealth.

Christians ask God's blessing on their food before they eat, but verse 10 tells us to bless God *after* we have eaten. This is one way to remember that God "gives us richly all things to enjoy" (1 Tim. 6:17).

DEUTERONOMY 9

Moses is pointing out dangers that God's people must avoid: forgetting God's goodness (chap. 6), compromising with the enemy (chap. 7), and becoming self-satisfied and complacent after great victory (chap. 8). In this chapter, he warns about a danger that all believers constantly face: the re-appearance of an old sin. In Israel's case, that sin was rebellion against God.

"But we are a new generation!" the people might have argued. "The old generation that died in the wilderness was guilty of rebellion. We are different!"

But Moses warned *them*. He knew that human nature is the same from one generation to another and that people rarely learn from the mistakes of others. *The sin we think we*

have conquered is the one that will conquer us. (See 1 Cor. 10:12.)

Your greatest fear may come before the battle (vv. 1-3), but your greatest danger may be after the battle (vv. 4-6). If the victory makes you proud, you will fall; but if God's blessing humbles you, you will succeed. God is able to make you stand (Rom. 14:4).

**Self-
Confident
People
Who Failed**

A wealthy farmer (Luke 12:13-21). A courageous apostle (Matt. 26:31-35). A mighty ruler (Dan. 4). A self-satisfied church (Rev. 3:14-22). Some successful businessmen (James 4:13-17). All those people failed. They apparently did not take these words to heart: "Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him" (Prov. 26:12).

DEUTERONOMY 10

Moses balances the two important themes of *law* (vv. 1-11) and *love* (vv. 12-22). Because God loves His people, He gives them His Word to nourish and guide them. *We cannot fully experience God's love for us unless we are obedient to His will.* The will of God is the expression of the love of God (Ps. 33:11).

There is no question that God loves His people (vv. 15-18). He has stated it clearly in His Word and has proved it in many ways, especially in giving His Son to die for the sins of the world (Rom. 5:8). We should love God (vv. 12-14) and prove it by our obedient service and our worship. If we love God, we will also love others (v. 19; 1 John 4:7-12).

God wants to write His Word on our hearts and make it a part of the inner person (2 Cor. 3:1-3). If you love the Word, meditate on it daily, and obey it, the Spirit will perform this wonderful work and transform your life.

DEUTERONOMY 11

What God did (1–7). Moses reminded the people of God's past mercies by using the phrase "what He did" five times. They did not win the battle in their own strength; God gave the victory. Note that Moses selected two examples of God's judgment, one from outside the nation (Egypt) and one from within the nation (the rebellion of Dathan and Abiram). The second is more dangerous than the first (Acts 20:28–30).

What God asks (8–21). He asks that His people obey Him because their obedience is their strength and life (vv. 8–9). They could not prosper in the land without God's constant care and blessing (Matt. 6:33). The Word in the heart will control the hand, the eyes and the tongue and will protect and direct the household (vv. 18–19).

What God promises (22–32). God's "I will" is all the promise we need! If we choose to obey, God will bless, even though we may experience trials and burdens. If we choose to disobey, God will still keep His promise and chasten us. If we love Him (vv. 1, 13, 22), we will obey Him, and in that obedience is life.

DEUTERONOMY 12

Sometimes we think that a new location is the solution to all our problems, so we change jobs or addresses. It has well been said that a change in geography does not overcome a flaw in character. A change can bring out the best in us, but it might bring out the worst in us.

Moses warned that the new land could be a place of *entanglement* (vv. 1–4, 29–32) if the people disobeyed God. Today's pluralistic society tends to treat all religious faiths alike, but God demands that we worship and serve Him alone.

The land would be a place of *enjoyment* (vv. 5–19) if they followed the Lord, for God would give them safety, rest, and blessing. We receive our spiritual inheritance by God's grace (Eph. 1:3), and we claim it by faith; but we enjoy it only if we are obedient to His will.

The land was to be a place of *enlargement* (vv. 26–28) as the people trusted God to give them victory. God wants to enlarge

our lives; however, we must be careful that enlargement does not result in estrangement from God. It is folly to gain ground materially but lose it spiritually.

DEUTERONOMY 13

In Moses' day, as in our day, some people who claimed to have miraculous gifts were not faithful to the Lord. The test is not the person's ability to perform miracles, for even Satan can do that (2 Cor. 11:13-15; 2 Thess. 2:9-12), but his or her fidelity to the truth of God. Any leader who tempts us away from the Lord and His Word is an enemy and must be rejected.

Success does not determine truth, nor does personal affection (vv. 6-11). We must love truth more than we love people, no matter how painful our differences may be (Prov. 1:10ff.).

Numbers do not determine truth (vv. 12-18). If an entire city turned away from God, that is no reason for us to do so. God will stand with us (Matt. 10:28-42). Our allegiance must be "to the law and to the testimony" (Isa. 8:20).

DEUTERONOMY 14

The children of the Lord must not be like the people of the world. The basic meaning of the Hebrew word translated "holy" is "to be different." God's people are different.

Although the Jewish dietary code does not apply to God's people today (1 Tim. 4:1-5), the spiritual principle remains: we must be a separated and obedient people. The lists of "clean" and "unclean" foods were reminders that the people must learn to distinguish between what God accepts and what He rejects. Review Leviticus 11:41-47.

We should glorify God in what we receive and also in what we give (vv. 22-29). A tithe was 10 percent of the produce, which could be used as a sacrifice for joyful feasting before the Lord. A special tithe every third year supported the Levites and helped the poor.

In our receiving and in our giving, we should glorify God and joyfully serve Him. (See 1 Cor. 10:31.)

DEUTERONOMY 15

The blessing of God ought to motivate us to be a blessing and a help to others. Note how often Moses mentions the blessing of God (vv. 4, 6, 10, 14, 18). God has opened His hand generously to us, and we should open our hands widely to others (v. 8). He blesses us so that we might be a blessing (Gen. 12:2).

Not only must we have generous hands, but we should cultivate glad hearts as we share (v. 10). Giving is an occasion not for shrewd calculation (v. 9) but for jubilation! Paul may have had this verse in mind when he wrote “not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7).

The greatest gift of all is the gift of ourselves because we love one another (vv. 16–17). First we give ourselves to the Lord (Rom. 12:1–2) and then to one another in loving service (2 Cor. 8:1–5). There is plenty of room in “The Fellowship of the Pierced Ear.”

DEUTERONOMY 16

From the seven feasts on the Jewish calendar (Lev. 23), Moses selected three to emphasize, and they bear a message to the believer today.

Passover (1–8) looks to the past and reminds us that we have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb of God (John 1:29; 1 Pet. 1:18–19). Redemption brings responsibility: feeding on the Lamb and removing from our lives all things that are wrong. (See 1 Cor. 5:1–8).

Pentecost (9–12) speaks of renewal and the coming of the Spirit of God to His people (Acts 2). It is a harvest festival that calls us to enter into His service and help reap the harvest (Luke 10:2; John 4:33–38; Acts 1:8).

Tabernacles (13–17) reminded the Jews that they had lived in booths as a pilgrim people in the wilderness. We are “sojourners and pilgrims” in this world (1 Pet. 2:11) and must not get too settled down. Tabernacles also looks to the future kingdom that God has promised His people when their pilgrim journey is ended.

We need these three reminders today, lest we forget our redemption responsibilities.

DEUTERONOMY 17

Presumption. God's Word reveals God's will and we must not go beyond what God permits. To *transgress* (v. 2) means to "cross the line," which is presumptuous sin. God says, "Thus far and no farther!" and we must obey. That obedience applied to sentences of judgment (vv. 8–13). The sinner who challenged the judgment of God's appointed leaders was destined to die. "Hear and fear!"

Pride. Israel did ask for a king, and God gave them Saul (1 Sam. 8–10). We do not know whether he obeyed verses 18–20, but we do know that he failed to obey God's will (1 Sam. 15). His successor David was a man of God's Word, but David's son Solomon committed all of the sins named in verses 16–17 (1 Kings 10–11). There was great prosperity for a time, but then the nation divided and turned from God.

Common citizens, priests, judges, and kings—all had an obligation to submit to God's Word and obey it. The higher the position, the greater the responsibility. "Hear and fear!"

DEUTERONOMY 18

God's people should be a *generous* people (vv. 1–8), sharing what they have with those who serve (1 Cor. 9:1–14; 3 John 5–8). The priests and Levites depended on the sacrifices and the tithes for their sustenance, and an unfaithful people meant neglected servants. (See Neh. 13:10–14.)

They should also be a *separated* people (vv. 9–14). This is one of the strongest warnings in Scripture against occult practices, and it must be heeded today. Israel did not obey this command, and the land was defiled and the nation disciplined.

God's people must be a *discerning* people (vv. 15–22), listening to the Word, receiving it and obeying it. The Prophet mentioned here is Jesus Christ (Acts 3:18–23), but when He came, they did not recognize Him or receive Him (John 1:10–11; 5:43). The mark of a true prophet is that *everything* predicted comes to pass. The prophet is not 75 percent correct, but 100 percent correct!

DEUTERONOMY 19

There was a court system in Israel but no police force. The innocent person had to be protected before the family of a victim attempted to take vengeance. The cities of refuge provided a place of escape where the manslayer could be tried to see whether the death was manslaughter or murder.

The cities picture the salvation we have in Jesus Christ, the One to whom we have “fled for refuge” because death is pursuing us (Heb. 6:18; Rom. 6:23). The cities were appointed by God, and no other cities would do (Acts 4:12). They were accessible and available to all (Josh. 20:9; John 6:37), but the person had to believe God’s Word and act on it. The roads to those cities were clearly marked and kept in good repair. The way was open and free.

However, in Christ we have something far better! The manslayer was tried to see if he were a murderer, but those who trust Christ shall never face judgment (John 5:24; Rom. 8:1). Our High Priest lives forever and intercedes for us; therefore, we can never be refused (Heb. 7:23–28). We are indeed guilty, but He forgives us by His grace—and He takes our punishment for us!

DEUTERONOMY 20

Claiming our spiritual inheritance will involve battles as well as blessings, for the hosts of evil are against us (Eph. 6:10–13). God’s words to Israel help us understand how to defeat the enemies we face.

Before the battle: courage. We walk by faith and not by sight (v. 1) and must never judge the victory by our own resources or the resources of the enemy. God gives us the power to overcome, so take courage from the fact that God is with us and fights for us. Read 2 Chronicles 20:1–23 for an exciting example of this truth.

During the battle: obedience. We must be totally devoted to the Lord if we are to win the battle (2 Tim. 2:4). The battlefield is no place for the fearful and fainthearted or the doubleminded. We must obey whatever battle plan God assigns to us, for the enemy often employs a different strategy.

After the battle: complete conquest. Even in defeat, the enemy is still the enemy and can entice us into sin. Remember what happened to Achan (Josh. 7) and King Saul (1 Sam. 15).

DEUTERONOMY 21

Man is made in the image of God, and human life is precious in His sight. People are not to be treated like animals or things, and the laws in this chapter illustrate this truth.

Murder (1-9). The unlawful taking of a life is a tragedy that cannot be erased simply by burying a corpse. The heifer died instead of the culprit (Gen. 9:5-6), but the sacrifice did not atone for the murderer's sin. Rather, the sacrifice kept the land from being defiled by innocent blood (Deut. 19:10-13), and it reminded the people that life is precious.

Marriage (10-17). Jews were forbidden to marry Canaanites (Deut. 7:1-4), so the captured wife mentioned in these verses had to come from another nation. Women in general, and captives in particular, had very little status in those days; but God protected her from abuse. No matter how much authority we have, we must not mistreat others or take advantage of them.

Rebellion (18-23). A rebellious son would grieve his parents, bring shame to his village, and be a bad example to other young men. The fear of death might deter some sons, or like the prodigal (Luke 15:11ff.), they might decide to leave home. To us, it seems like a drastic law, but God will not tolerate rebellion.

See our Lord in this chapter: He died for guilty sinners; He loved and married a foreign bride (Eph. 5:25ff.); He died for rebellious sinners; and He was hanged on a tree (Gal. 3:13).

DEUTERONOMY 22

Lost possessions (1-4). God honors private ownership and demands honesty in the handling of other people's goods, even when it is not convenient. He also has compassion for animals (Exod. 23:5). We are stewards of all that God gives us, and we must be faithful.

Lost distinctions (5-12). The Bible makes it clear that "God is not the author of confusion" (1 Cor. 14:33), but confusion results when we ignore the distinctions God has made be-

tween men and women, animals, and even seeds and fabrics. Like the dietary laws, these rules reminded the Jews that they were a separated people, and the tassels on their clothing were an additional reminder.

Lost reputations (13–30). Here you see God's protection for the helpless in the land. It is a serious thing to bear false witness, particularly in the matter of sexual purity. A reputation can be ruined by people making false accusations. It is not enough simply to love virtue; sometimes we must also "put away the evil" (v. 21) and deal with sin.

DEUTERONOMY 23

The phrase "enter the assembly," used six times in this chapter, refers to participation in religious activities rather than citizenship in the nation. God has the right to decide who shall approach Him in worship. (See Ps. 15; John 4:19–24.) Of course, in Jesus Christ, these distinctions have been removed (Gal. 3:26–29), and the gospel call is to "whoever" (Rev. 22:17).

These laws were required because God walked in the camp (v. 14); therefore, the camp had to be clean. Even matters of personal hygiene were important (vv. 9–14). Christ walks among His churches (Rev. 1:13; 2:1) and wants to see a holy people.

Verse 4 shows the sad consequences of sin, of both omission (the people did not help Israel) and commission (they hired Balaam). The kindness that we show to others, we also show to Christ (Matt. 25:31–46). One act of unkindness may bring years of sorrow.

Even the source of our money is God's concern (vv. 17–18). The pagan temples had religious prostitutes, male ("dogs") and female, and God would not accept their money earned by abominable means.

These miscellaneous regulations remind us that God is interested in the details of our lives. He wants us to be holy so that we may fellowship with Him (2 Cor. 6:14–18).

DEUTERONOMY 24

Knowing the sinfulness of the human heart, God gave these laws to promote happiness (v. 5) and to prevent oppression (v. 14) and the perversion of the law (v. 17).

Husbands and wives (1–5). God allowed divorced people to remarry; but this was a concession, not a commandment (Matt. 19:1–12). The divorced wife, protected by this law, could establish a new home, and she did not become a castaway. God wants happiness and holiness in our homes. We will enjoy those blessings if we obey Him and love one another.

Masters and servants (6–18). God sees how we treat those who depend on us for their living. We must never humiliate others because they have less money or authority than we do. When we start to get proud and insensitive, we should remember what we were before the Lord saved us (vv. 18, 22; Titus 3:3–8).

Helping Others

When others have needs, don't close your eyes (Prov. 28:27), your ears (Prov. 21:13), your hand, or your heart (Deut. 15:7; 1 John 3:17). Good words are not a substitute for good works (James 2:14–17; 1 John 3:18). When we share with the poor, we give to the Lord, and He sees to it that there are dividends for them and for us (Prov. 19:17).

Rich and poor (19–22). God had special concern for the poor, and He depended on the generosity of His people to meet their needs. He promised to bless all who showed compassion to aliens, widows, and orphans. We should ask ourselves where we would be if others helped us to the same degree that we help others.

DEUTERONOMY 25

The emphasis is on respecting people and treating them as fellow human beings, made in the image of God. It is wrong to humiliate others or take advantage of them (vv. 1–3, 11–12).

We also should have respect for animals (v. 4; see also Prov. 12:10). It would be frustrating for an ox to be in the midst of

plenty and not be able to eat. The apostle Paul saw a much wider application of this verse (1 Cor. 9:1–14; 1 Tim. 5:17–18).

We should respect the family (vv. 5–10). This law was significant in Israel because of family and tribal inheritance. It does not apply today, but the principle is clear: the family carries on the life of the nation, and it must be protected.

We must have respect for truth (vv. 13–16) and not be devious in our business dealings. Read Proverbs 11:1 and 20:10, and heed the warning of Proverbs 21:6.

DEUTERONOMY 26

These two rituals were to be observed after the nation had entered Canaan and become an agricultural society. When they had reaped their first harvest, the people were to give the firstfruits to God to acknowledge Him as the Redeemer of the nation. God still wants us to put Him first and give Him glory for the blessings He freely bestows on us (Prov. 3:5–10).

They were also to present the “third-year tithe” to help support the Levites and the poor in the land. As with the ceremony of firstfruits, the people were to confess the Lord’s goodness in blessing the land and giving the harvest.

There is nothing wrong with special times of ceremony and celebration, especially when we make new beginnings. However, we must focus on worshiping God and not just observing a ceremony.

These two events remind us of the two great commandments, to love God first and then to love our neighbor. Grateful obedience is a hallmark of God’s special people (vv. 16–19).

DEUTERONOMY 27

This ceremony was observed only once, after Israel entered the land and began to conquer it (Josh. 8:30–35). It was a solemn reminder to them that obedience to God was the secret of success (Josh. 1:8).

The Law was written on large stones so that everyone could read it. Today, as we read and meditate on God’s Word, the Spirit writes it on our hearts and transforms us from within (2 Cor. 3:1–3, 18).

The ceremony was a renewal of the nation’s covenant with

God, for new beginnings deserve new acts of dedication. The burnt offering spoke of total dedication to God. The peace offerings, and the meal that followed, spoke of joyful fellowship with God.

The curses are related to the Law already given in the Ten Commandments and cover many aspects of personal life. Israel's obeying the Law did not deliver them from Egypt or take them into Canaan, but it did enable them to live together and enjoy the blessings of God.

None of us can wholly keep God's law or fully meet all His righteous demands. We give thanks for what Christ has done for us on the cross (Gal. 3:10-14) and what the Spirit does in our lives (Rom. 8:1-4).

DEUTERONOMY 28

God began with the blessings (vv. 1-14), but the major part of the address was given to the judgments. If this seems to be out of balance, just keep in mind that God knew their hearts (Deut. 5:29).

God promised to bless every area of their lives (vv. 2-6), including their political ventures (vv. 7, 13), their agriculture (vv. 8, 11-12), and their witness to the Gentiles (vv. 9-10). By being a separated and holy people, they would be a light to the Gentiles (Isa. 49:6), but they failed in their mission. Compare verse 10 with verse 25.

Obedience would lift them higher (vv. 1, 13), make them richer (vv. 3-6, 8), and keep them safer (v. 7). From a spiritual point of view, we can claim these promises today.

The curses are frightening, yet they eventually came upon the nation because the people turned from God to idols and disobeyed the Word of God. They did not *diligently* obey God, *carefully* observe His law, or *joyfully* do His will (vv. 1, 47). If we do not "serve the LORD with gladness" (Ps. 100:2), we will end up serving the enemy with sadness.

DEUTERONOMY 29

It is a serious thing to enter into a covenant with the Lord. He will keep His part of the agreement, but we are prone to

disobey. If we are to be faithful, we need spiritual renewal for our eyes, ears, and hearts (v. 4). We need to see His hand at work, hear His Word, and love Him with all our hearts.

For forty years, the people saw miracles and heard words, yet they did not perceive what God was doing. They saw His acts but did not understand His ways (Ps. 103:7). They had seen God defeat the idols of Egypt, yet they still had idolatry in their hearts. What could have been spiritual experiences was only a series of historical events because they did not focus on the Lord.

Our responsibility is to obey what we know and not pry into what we do not know (v. 29). Ponder Matthew 13:10–17, and then examine your spiritual perception.

DEUTERONOMY 30

The purpose of chastening is restoration, not ruination. God knows what His people will do, so He makes provision for them to repent and return. He has done this for His people today (1 John 1:5–2:2).

Note the repetition of the little word *all*. God will send *all* His judgments among His people in *all* the nations (v. 1), so that with *all* their hearts and souls they will obey *all* He has commanded (v. 2). If we fail to deal with any sin, or if we ignore any word from God, our repentance will be incomplete.

The heart needs “spiritual surgery” if it is to love the Lord and obey Him (v. 6; Deut. 10:16; Jer. 4:4; Rom. 2:25–29). Every child of God has experienced this (Col. 2:11) and, by faith, can live victoriously. When we receive the Word in our hearts (vv. 11–14), we have both the desire and the dynamic to obey God and glorify Him. The heart of victory is the heart!

DEUTERONOMY 31

Moses could have closed his life under a dark cloud of discouragement. Instead, he gave encouragement to his people as they faced the challenge of a new life in a new land under a new leader.

He encouraged *the people* (vv. 1–6) not to be afraid of the enemy because the Lord would go before them and give them

victory. He gave a similar word of encouragement to *Joshua* (vv. 7–8). It would not be easy for Joshua to take the place of a great man like Moses, but he still had the God of Moses as his help.

Moses encouraged *the Levites* (vv. 9–13, 24–29) to protect and proclaim the Word of God and to teach it to the whole nation. If Israel did not enjoy the Word, they could not enjoy the blessings of God in their inheritance.

God changes His workers, but His work goes on. No matter who our spiritual leaders are, we must love the Lord and live according to His Word. That is the secret of blessing and success. It is also the secret of being an encouragement to others.

DEUTERONOMY 32

God gave Moses this song to teach the people so that they would learn to love and obey Him (Deut. 31:19–30). Our songs today should follow this pattern by revealing the greatness and goodness of the Lord and thus encouraging us to live for Him (v. 3).

The key image for God is “the Rock.” It speaks of His stability in a changing world and His dependability in a demanding world (v. 4). The Rock is our Savior (v. 15), Father (v. 18), and Deliverer (vv. 30–31). He is all that we need.

Israel is compared to young eagles that must leave the nest and learn how to fly (vv. 11–12). But Israel is also God’s treasure, and He will protect His people (vv. 34–35). Moses reminded them not to forget their beginning (v. 18) or ignore their “latter end” (v. 29).

Moses compared God’s Word to the rain and the dew (v. 2), which come down from heaven and bring life and refreshment to the earth. Much sharing of the Word may seem to be a waste, but the Word accomplishes God’s purposes whether we see it or not (Isa. 55:10–11).

Much of this song is a warning to the people that they were prone to forget what God did for them and to turn from God to idols. We do not know how often they sang this song, but we do know that they did not take it to heart. Do God’s people today pay attention to what they are singing?

DEUTERONOMY 33

Before viewing the land, Moses viewed the future and told the tribes what lay ahead. When Jacob gave his blessing before he died, he revealed some of the sins of his sons (Gen. 49), but Moses did not do that. Instead, he focused primarily on the relationship of the tribes with the Lord and how each one would have a distinctive character, blessing, and ministry.

God's people are privileged to be in His hand for safe-keeping (John 10:28–29) and at His feet for learning and obeying (v. 3). We are “between His shoulders,” next to His heart (v. 12), and He bears us with His “everlasting arms” (v. 27). What more could we want?

Verse 25 is a good reminder to live a day at a time, as all creation lives (Matt. 6:25–34). The best way to destroy *today* is to regret *yesterday* and worry about *tomorrow*. Israel faced some difficult days, but God would be with them and help them *a day at a time*.

DEUTERONOMY 34

When your time comes to die, the important thing is not the grandeur of your funeral but the greatness of your life. In fact, how you live now will determine how you will die then.

Moses lived in the heights, and he died in the heights. He often met God on the mountain, saw His glory, and experienced His grace. Keep your mind and heart “in the heavens” as you live on earth (Col. 3:1ff.).

Moses lived in God's will and died in God's will. You never have to fear life or death if you walk in obedience to the Lord. Moses died “the death of the righteous” (Num. 23:10) because he lived the life of the righteous.

Finally, Moses lived with a forward vision, and he died with a forward vision as he viewed the Promised Land. The nation so often wanted to go back to Egypt, but he challenged them to go forward to the inheritance God prepared for them.

It is good to plan your funeral, but it is also good to live your life in such a way that you will be missed when you are gone.

THE BOOKS OF HISTORY

The books of Joshua through Esther record key events in the history of Israel: their conquest of Canaan (Joshua); compromise with the enemy (Judges); the establishment of the kingdom, ending with a divided nation (1 and 2 Samuel—2 Chronicles); the captivity; and the return from exile (Ezra—Esther).

Israel's besetting sin was idolatry, and these books record the decay of the nation both politically and spiritually because the people turned away from God and His Word. Throughout the turbulent history, God was faithful to His people, sending them prophets to call them to repentance and helping them in their crises. But the people repeatedly turned away from God to serve heathen idols, and the Lord finally had to chasten them and send them into captivity. God preserved His people so that He might send the promised Redeemer and fulfill His covenant to Abraham that through Israel all nations would be blessed.

Political systems change, as do means of war and international diplomacy, but human nature is the same today as in the days of Joshua, David, Solomon, and Hezekiah. As you read the history of Israel, you will discover how contemporary it really is: "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people" (Prov. 14:34).

JOSHUA

The book of Joshua records the dedication of the nation (chaps. 1–5), the defeat of the enemy (chaps. 6–12), and the division of the land (chaps. 13–24). Joshua leads Israel from victory to victory as they follow the Lord and claim their promised inheritance.

The man Joshua is a picture of our Lord Jesus Christ who won the victory over sin and Satan and who gives rest to those who trust Him (Heb. 4; Matt. 11:28–30). Joshua knew that he was second in command (Josh. 5:13–15), and his career illustrates the victory we have through faith (1 John 5:1–5). Each of us has a spiritual inheritance to claim, a “land” to conquer, and Joshua tells us how to do it. The word *inheritance* is used fifty-eight times in Joshua. (See Eph. 1:11; Col. 1:12.)

JOSHUA 1

God equips us. Joshua was not in an easy situation, facing a difficult assignment and replacing a great leader like Moses. But God had equipped him and prepared him for this very work. Joshua had faithfully served with Moses and was now qualified to lead. The task that you faithfully do today gets you ready for what God is preparing for you (Matt. 25:21).

God encourages us. The inheritance can be claimed only by the obedience of faith (v. 3), but faith and obedience demand courage. God encouraged Joshua by giving His promise (v. 6) and the assurance of His presence (v. 9) and by reminding him that his success came from the Word (vv. 7–8). God also encouraged Joshua through the people (vv. 16–18). Are you an encouragement to your leaders?

God enables us. "Be strong!" is much more than an admonition (vv. 6, 7, 18), for God's commandments are God's enablements. It was not Joshua's experience or skill that brought the victory; more than once, he was defeated. The victory came from the power of God that was released when they obeyed Him by faith. God still does the impossible (Luke 1:37)!

Joshua— Training for Leadership

Joshua did not seek a place of leadership, but he was called and trained by God to be successor to Moses. Joshua knew the rigors of slavery in Egypt. He also knew how to obey orders as he served with Moses (Exod. 24:13). He had courage to face the enemy (Exod. 17:8-16) and faith to believe God for victory (Num. 14:1-10). His given name was Hoshea ("salvation"), but Moses changed it to Joshua ("Jehovah is salvation"). Even Joshua's name reminded people that he had faith in God.

JOSHUA 2

Joshua's sending the spies to Jericho was an act of wisdom, not unbelief (Prov. 20:18). The report of the two men encouraged Israel for the invasion (v. 24) and reminded them that God was fulfilling His promise to them (Deut. 2:25).

But the visit also meant the salvation of Rahab and her family. Although the Bible does not commend Rahab for her lies, it does commend her faith (Heb. 11:31) that revealed itself in works (James 2:25). Her faith saved her and her family from destruction (Josh. 6:17-19), and it resulted in her becoming an ancestress of the Messiah (Matt. 1:5). Once you begin to trust God and obey Him, you never know what He will do!

JOSHUA 3

Joshua was an early riser (v. 1; 6:12; 7:16; 8:10). He probably devoted that quiet time to praying and meditating on God's Word (Josh. 1:8; Ps. 63:1). This is a good example for us to follow today. (See Mark 1:35.)

We face an unknown future (v. 4) and need the Lord's presence as we step out each day. God goes before us and we must follow as He directs. God knows the way, leads the way and opens the way. He is "Lord of all the earth" (v. 11), and there is nothing for us to fear.

The priests had to get their feet wet before the nation could cross over, and that took faith. Your faith can encourage others in their walk with God. It takes great faith to walk through the water, but it takes even greater faith to walk *on the water* (Matt. 14:23-33). Are you still lingering on the banks or in the boat?

The future is your friend when you follow the Lord and trust His promises.

JOSHUA 4

It is good to memorialize the great acts of the Lord, provided that the memorials do not become idols. Each new generation must learn what God has done for His people so that they will obey His Word and trust Him for the future (Ps. 78:1-8). When you have living faith in a living God, the past is not "dead history." It throbs with living reality.

"Crossing the Jordan" is not a picture of dying and going to heaven despite what some songs say. It illustrates the teaching of Romans 6: death to the old self-life and identification with Christ in resurrection power. Nobody but God can see the stones in the middle of the Jordan, but the record bears witness that they are there. So it is with the death and resurrection of Christ: we believe the record and thus experience the miracle.

The stones on the shore reminded the people that the old life was buried and they should "walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4; Col. 3:1ff.). Have you crossed the Jordan and set up your memorial of faith?

JOSHUA 5

Israel had experienced a great miracle, the enemy was frightened, and God was at work. Now was the time for action! *But God told His people to wait.* Why? So that He might prepare them for the conquest of the land.

We must deal with the past (1-9). The new generation had not received the mark of the covenant (Gen. 17), so this ritual was a reaffirmation of their relationship with God. Circumcision symbolizes putting off what belongs to the sinful flesh (Rom. 8:13; Col. 2:11-12) and devoting the heart wholly to the Lord (Deut. 10:16; Jer. 4:4). The nation had experienced this *collectively* in crossing the Jordan, but it had to be made personal.

We must trust for the present (10-12). The nation stopped eating manna and started eating food that God naturally provided. There is a place for the miraculous, but God never wastes miracles. If we do the possible, He will do the impossible. The women baked unleavened bread for Passover, and the nation remembered how God had redeemed them from the land of Egypt.

We must submit for the future (13-15). Joshua met Jesus Christ and learned that the Lord already had a plan for taking Jericho. All Joshua had to do was obey and remember that he was on "holy ground." From that time, whenever Joshua took off his shoes, it reminded him that he was second in command. That was the secret of his victory (2 Chron. 20:15).

JOSHUA 6

If God calls you to do His work, He will tell you how to do it. His plans may seem foolish to you, but they always work if you obey by faith (Isa. 55:8-11).

As we today seek to conquer territory for the Lord, we do not follow the same procedure Joshua used, but we must obey the same principles of faith and obedience. We use spiritual weapons to break down the barriers in men's minds and to claim them for Christ (2 Cor. 10:1-6).

How could a holy, loving God command the killing of the entire population of a city? The people were wicked sinners with whom God had been patient for years (Gen. 15:16-21).

They knew that judgment was coming (Josh. 2:9-11) and could have followed the example of Rahab and been delivered if they had exercised faith.

God was wiping the land clean so that His people would not be defiled and His great plan of salvation frustrated (Deut. 7:1-11). The Canaanites sinned against a flood of light, *just as people are doing today!* Christ died for the sins of the world. Individuals who do not trust Him will die in their own sins. Are you sharing the good news of the gospel?

JOSHUA 7

We can be tempted in the midst of victory. The spies were tempted to be presumptuous and Achan to be covetous. Achan should have been attending to his military duties, but his eyes wandered and he walked into sin (v. 21; see also Gen. 3:6). He valued the spoils more than he valued obedience to God (Ps. 119:162). King Saul made the same mistake (1 Sam. 15).

We never sin alone. God sees His people as one, so the sin of Achan was the sin of the whole nation. (See 1 Cor. 12:12-27.) One man's sin caused the death of thirty-six soldiers.

Sin ultimately brings defeat. The secret of success is knowing and obeying God's Word (Josh. 1:8), and Achan knew that. But he deliberately disobeyed God and brought defeat to the army, disgrace to the Lord, and dismay to his commander. Joshua started looking back instead of looking ahead (v. 7)!

Sin cannot be hidden forever. There is a time to pray about a problem and a time to get up and deal with it. The punishment may seem severe to us, but Achan knew the rules. The main thing is the glory of God (v. 9).

The Jews raised another heap of stones, this time a witness to the trouble ("Achor") sin causes, but read Hosea 2:15 and rejoice.

JOSHUA 8

Never permit one failure to rob you of future victory. When God sees that we have obeyed His Word and sincerely dealt with sin, He comes with encouragement and guidance for the next step. It has well been said that the victorious Chris-

tian life is a series of new beginnings. (See Ps. 37:23-24.)

Had Achan only waited, he could have taken all the spoils he desired, but he ran ahead of God and lost everything. (See Matt. 6:33.)

Joshua knew how to bring victory from defeat, for he used the original battle plan to deceive the inhabitants of Ai. Now *they* were the ones who were presumptuous, and it cost them their lives. The strategy in verse 26 was learned from Moses (Exod. 17:8-13).

New victories ought to result in new steps of dedication (vv. 30-35). Joshua obeyed what Moses had commanded (Deut. 27), for obedience to the Word is the secret of success (Josh. 1:8).

JOSHUA 9

The Gibeonites knew that their neighbors were fighting a losing battle, for God was fighting for Israel, and no army could resist Him. So, they decided to use guile instead of muscle. If Satan does not defeat you by coming as the devouring lion (1 Pet. 5:8-9), he will try again as the deceiving serpent (2 Cor. 11:3). He never gives up.

The humiliating defeat at Ai should have taught Joshua and the leaders to take time to pray and seek the mind of the Lord. After all, the Lord was the Commander of the army (Josh. 5:13-15). But they walked by sight and not by faith, and unbelief has a hard time waiting (Isa. 28:16; 30:1-2).

Another defeat! The Lord lost glory, the leaders lost stature, and the nation lost a potential victory: "What agreement has the temple of God with idols?" (2 Cor. 6:16). But Joshua did not give up; rather, *he made his mistakes work for him* (vv. 21-27). That is the mark of a great leader.

JOSHUA 10

When you make an agreement with the enemy, there is no end to the problems you create for yourself. Israel had to defend the very people they should have defeated. Imagine the servants commanding the masters (v. 6)!

God could have said, "You got yourself into this, so you can get yourself out!" But instead, He gave His people encourage-

ment (v. 8) and fought for them from heaven (vv. 10–11). When Joshua needed more time to finish the battle, God stayed the sun and moon in answer to prayer. The Canaanites worshiped the heavenly bodies, so this miracle must have impressed them greatly. If we are doing the will of God, prayer has tremendous power.

Victory over the five kings opened the way for Joshua to attack southern Canaan until he had subdued the whole region. What began as a humiliating defense maneuver ended up a glorious series of victories: “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31).

JOSHUA 11—12

The enemy in the north of Canaan united to resist Israel’s advance, and their forces were formidable. But God assured Joshua that he would win the battle, and he did. God assures us before the battle (11:6), fights for us during the battle (11:8), and commands us after the battle (11:9, 15). How we follow orders after the victory is as important as what we do before the battle begins.

Joshua conquered the whole land and did it to provide each Israelite with his inheritance from the Lord (11:23). God helped him defeat thirty-one kings and claim their land and their wealth for the Lord and His people. Our Joshua, the Son of God, has defeated every spiritual enemy and now reigns in heaven (Eph. 1:15–23; Col. 2:9–15). Through Him, we can “reign in life” (Rom. 5:17) and claim the victory.

JOSHUA 13

Unlike some elderly people, Joshua lived in the future and not in the past. He had a job to do, and he wanted to complete it before he died. He was not satisfied to defeat thirty-one kings. He urged the tribes to possess the land they had conquered and claim it for the Lord.

No matter how much God has enabled you to accomplish in life, there is always much more land to possess. In the Christian life, we never stand still; we go either forward or backward. The challenge to the believer is Hebrews 6:1: “Let us go on!”

In all his ministry, Joshua was careful to follow the regulations laid down by Moses. Obedience to the Word guaranteed his success (Josh. 1:8).

Did the Levites feel left out? How could they, when God was their inheritance (v. 33)!

JOSHUA 14

Caleb illustrates the truth that “through faith and patience [we] inherit the promises” (Heb. 6:12). Along with Joshua, Caleb was eager to claim his inheritance over forty years before, but the nation had rebelled in unbelief. Patiently, Caleb endured the trials of the wilderness; he knew that his future was secure (Num. 14:24). That unbelieving generation had no hope, for they died in the wilderness, but Caleb had a “living hope” because of his faith (1 Pet. 1:3ff.).

What an example for us to follow! Age did not hinder him, the disappointments of the past did not embitter him, and giants did not frighten him! At a time in life when others were looking for security and ease, Caleb was saying, “Give me this mountain!” (v. 12). His secret? “He wholly followed the LORD God of Israel” (v. 14).

JOSHUA 15

Had the people chosen their inheritance, there no doubt would have been competition and conflict; but the Lord assigned the territory, and the tribes submitted to His will.

“For who makes you differ from another?” asked Paul. “And what do you have that you did not receive?” (1 Cor. 4:7). John the Baptist said, “A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven” (John 3:27).

Whenever you envy another’s achievements or abilities, you are forgetting this basic spiritual principle. Whenever you complain to God because of what you are *not*, instead of praising Him for what you are, you need to listen again to Paul and John the Baptist.

This is not to suggest that you become complacent. Caleb fought courageously to claim his God-given inheritance, and so did Othniel, his son-in-law. Caleb’s daughter had faith to *ask* for additional blessings, and she received them. God

gives—we possess by faith. We must accept whatever inheritance He grants us.

The people could rest on Psalm 47:4 and the Levites on Psalm 16:5. Are you happy with the perfect choices that God makes?

JOSHUA 16—17

Ephraim and Manasseh were Joseph's two sons, born to him in Egypt. Jacob adopted them as his own and gave them a special blessing from the Lord (Gen. 48), which explains why these two tribes were given such valuable land in the heart of Canaan. Joseph had kept the family alive during seven years of famine, and his descendants reaped the benefits. They were wealthy because of Joseph's faith and love and Jacob's special blessing.

However, we must not live only on what our ancestors have provided. We must also claim an inheritance for ourselves and our children (17:14–18). The two tribes did a lot of complaining but not much conquering! In the case of Zelophehad's daughters (17:3–6), they had not because they asked not (James 4:2). In the case of the two tribes, they had not because they claimed not. Are you guilty?

JOSHUA 18—19

Since it was centrally located, Shiloh was the ideal place for the tabernacle. During the years of Israel's wanderings, the tabernacle was in the center of the camp. Now it was at the center of the land, accessible to all and a reminder that the fear of God must be at the heart of the nation.

Beware the sin of neglect! It was not the enemy that prevented the tribes from claiming their inheritance; it was their own indifference and indolence. (See James 4:17.)

The surveyors gathered the facts, but God gave the guidance needed for the allocation of the land (18:8–10). We must cooperate with the Lord if we want to know His will. Although we must not *lean on* our own understanding (Prov. 3:6), we must have understanding in order for God to direct us.

Joshua saw to it that the distribution to the tribes was completed before he received his own inheritance (19:49–50). The

city of Timnath was located in a mountainous region where life would not be easy. Joshua could have chosen the finest place in the land, but he put others first and let them take the best (1 Cor. 10:24; Phil. 2:1-4).

JOSHUA 20

The cities of refuge are mentioned in Exodus 21:12-13, Numbers 35, and Deuteronomy 19, so you may want to review those passages.

Jesus Christ is our "city of refuge" (Heb. 6:18-20), but the salvation He gives is in contrast to the refuge given to the manslayer. It is true that the sinner must come to Christ (Matt. 11:28-30), but it is also true that Christ first comes to us (Luke 19:10). The elders of the six cities did not go seeking for people to help.

When we come to Christ, there is no trial to determine our guilt. We know we are guilty! That is why we fled to Him! We did not stand at the door and wait; we entered the open door (John 10:9) and were welcomed by the Savior, knowing that we would never face condemnation (John 5:24; Rom. 8:1). The manslayer had to remain in the city, but we "go in and out and find pasture" (John 10:9).

JOSHUA 21

After the land was apportioned, the writer looked back and made one summary statement: *God keeps His promises* (v. 45).

God kept His promise and gave the land to Israel (v. 43). He had promised it first to Abraham (Gen. 13:14-17), and then to his descendants (Gen. 17:8). On the basis of that promise, Joshua entered Canaan, defeated the enemy, and claimed the land for Israel.

God kept His promise and gave them rest from war, enabling them to conquer all their enemies and enjoy their inheritance (v. 44). (See Deut. 12:10; 25:19; Josh. 1:13.) We have spiritual rest today through Christ (Heb. 3-4) and will one day enter into eternal rest.

God kept His promise and scattered the Levites throughout Israel (Gen. 49:7). He gave them forty-eight towns, including the cities of refuge. It should have been a blessing to Israel

to have these servants of God living in many different places and sharing the truth of the Word with the people (Deut. 33:10).

Not one word of His promises has failed (v. 45; Josh. 23:14; 1 Kings 8:56). You can trust the Word of God.

JOSHUA 22

Not only had the Lord kept His promises to Israel, but Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh had kept their promise as well (Num. 32:25–32). It was time for them to cross the Jordan and join their families.

Joshua *commended* them for their faithful service, something that all of us should do for those who have ministered well (1 Thess. 5:12–13). He also *commanded* them to obey the Lord and serve Him sincerely. Finally, he *cautioned* them not to become selfish but to share the spoils with their brethren. Perhaps Achan came to mind as Joshua spoke to them.

The land was at rest, but the eastern tribes were restless because the Jordan River separated them from their brethren. Would their children grow up and think they were not truly Israelites? They should have considered that when they chose the boundary!

The building of the altar was at first misunderstood as a declaration of war, but then it became a witness of peace and unity. It is too bad when God's people are forced to manufacture evidence to bear witness of their unity. Before you declare war on the brethren, stop to find out what is going on. Maybe you agree after all! Ponder Proverbs 18:13 and James 3:13–18.

JOSHUA 23

No matter how great leaders may be, they cannot last forever, although their work is never lost (1 John 2:17). Like his predecessor Moses, Joshua gave a farewell address, first to his leaders (chap. 23) and then to the people as a whole (chap. 24).

He magnified the Lord and not himself. No one would question that Joshua was a gifted leader and a great general, but he gave the glory to God.

He challenged the people to keep trusting God and claim-

ing their inheritance. In the book of Judges, you will discover how their incomplete obedience led to compromise and severe discipline from the Lord. Joshua had warned them (v. 16), but they forgot his words. Triumph was turned into tragedy.

He reminded them that God's Word never fails (v. 14) and must be obeyed completely if God is to continue His blessing on the land. Verse 7 explains how to wander from the Lord, and the nation did exactly that!

You are writing your own "farewell speech" right now. What will it sound like?

Family Faith

Joshua was a great leader and a courageous general, and he was also a godly father who led his family in serving the Lord. He took seriously the example of Abraham (Gen. 18:19) and the exhortation of Moses (Deut. 6:4-9). Parents today need to take these Scriptures seriously, and also what Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:22-6:4.

JOSHUA 24

Geography. Joshua chose a meaningful place for his final message, for Shechem held many memories for Israel. There God appeared to Abraham (Gen. 12:6-7), and there Jacob had a "family revival" as he went to Bethel (Gen. 35:1-4). Shechem was near Mount Ebal where the people had rededicated themselves to the Lord after entering the land (Josh. 8:30-35). Being in a special place can sometimes make it easier for us to meet with God.

History. Joshua reviewed the history of Israel and reminded the people of God's grace and goodness in calling Abraham, delivering Israel from Egypt, and giving them their land. It is good to review the past and remember the mercies of the Lord.

Sincerity. Our God is “a jealous God” in that He will not tolerate rivals. He will not be one of several gods in our lives; He must be Lord of all. Everybody serves some god, and if it is not the true God as revealed in Jesus Christ, it is a false god.

Joshua issued the challenge: “Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve!” (v. 15). Have you chosen wisely?

Stones

Stones played an important role in the march of Israel through Canaan. The stones at the Jordan (4:1–9) reminded them of the miracle God performed as He opened the river; they also commemorated the people’s death to the old life. The heap of stones in the Valley of Achor told of Achan’s sin and the tragedy of covetousness and disobedience (7:25–26). The stones of the Law at Mount Ebal (8:31–32) spoke of Israel’s dedication to God to obey His Word. The stone altar on the eastern bank of the Jordan was a witness to unity (22:10ff.), and the stone Joshua set up bore witness that the people promised to serve only the Lord (24:26–27). Over the years, those messengers became only monuments, and the people forgot what they meant. Today God’s people still tend to forget what God would have us remember about our relationship with Him.

JUDGES

Judges is the book of “no king” (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). God was their King, but the nation refused to obey Him. Their disobedience led to defeat (chaps. 1–2), discipline (chaps. 3–16) and decay (chaps. 17–21). Eight times we are told that the people “did evil” in God’s sight and therefore had to be chastened. When God disciplined them, they cried out for mercy and were delivered, but then they lapsed back into their evil ways and had to be disciplined again.

In the book of Joshua, God was with *the whole nation* as they conquered the land. But in Judges, God turned from the nation and gave victory to *individuals* He called and empowered by His Spirit (3:10; 6:34; 11:29; etc.). Thirteen different judges are named in the book. Judges 2:16–19 is the best summary of Israel’s history at this period—and a sad history it is.

We are living in a similar period today. God’s people in general do not appear to be marching from victory to victory; but here and there, God enables selected servants, by the power of His Spirit, to accomplish great things for His glory. There will be no peace until there is a King in Israel.

JUDGES 1

After the death of Joshua and the move of the two and a half tribes to the east of the Jordan, the nation did not function as one great army. Individual tribes fought to claim their inheritance, and often the tribes worked together; but something was definitely lost in the transition. God’s people must endeavor “to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3).

What began with conquest (vv. 1–26) soon became compromise (vv. 27–36) as the defeated tribes gave in to the enemy. If

we do not defeat the enemy completely, the enemy will eventually defeat us. Israel learned their ways and worshiped their gods, and the Lord had to chasten His people to bring them back. They forgot the warnings of Moses (Deut. 7) and Joshua (Josh. 23).

It has well been said, "The one thing we learn from history is that we do not learn from history." Read 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1 and take it to heart.

JUDGES 2

The tragedy of missed opportunities!

Opportunity for rededication (1–6). It was at Gilgal that Israel first camped after crossing the Jordan (Josh. 4:19), and there they "rolled away" the old life (Josh. 5). But all they did this time was weep, and their weeping was not a sign of true repentance. It was a passing emotional experience that brought no change to their hearts.

The Angel of the Lord

The Angel of the Lord in the Old Testament is generally agreed to be our Lord Jesus Christ who came to earth temporarily on occasion to deliver special messages or to accomplish special tasks. Among others, He ministered to Hagar (Gen. 16), Abraham (Gen. 22), Jacob (Gen. 31:11), and Moses (Exod. 3), and He appeared to Joshua (Josh. 5:13–15). Though we do not recognize them, the angels minister to God's people today (Heb. 1:14), and the Lord Jesus is with us as we walk with Him (Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5–6).

Opportunity for training (7–10). The older generation failed to teach the younger generation God's truth as Moses

had commanded them (Deut. 6:1-9). It is bad enough that they forgot Joshua, their second greatest leader, but how could they forget the Lord? You will find the explanation in Deuteronomy 8.

Opportunity for witness (11-23). The nations in Canaan were in terrible bondage to ignorance, idolatry, and immorality, and they desperately needed to know the true God of Israel. But instead of giving illumination (Isa. 49:6), the Jews stooped to imitation and joined their neighbors in their sins. What an opportunity Israel missed, and what a price they paid!

In their relationship with God, the next generation, and their neighbors, Israel failed. Are we also failing in these ways today?

JUDGES 3

The presence of the enemy in the land was an opportunity for teaching, testing, and trusting. The younger generation could learn how to fight, and that would keep them from taking their inheritance for granted. God could test His people and encourage them to trust Him for victory. Even though the tribes had failed to drive out the enemy, God was still with His people and wanted to help them.

Chastening

The key passage is Hebrews 12:1-11. The word chastening means "child training" and refers to the process God uses to mature us and make us more like Jesus Christ. He tests us to bring out the best in us, but Satan tempts us to bring out the worst in us. If we persist in disobeying God, He will discipline us to bring us to submission. This is an act of love, a Father maturing a child and not a Judge punishing a criminal (Prov. 3:11-12).

God's people must live *in* the world, but they must not live *like* the world. Israel forgot the Lord and adopted the ways of the enemy. It began with intermarriage, which led to the worship of idols. After all, when you visit your in-laws, you must be polite to their gods!

How humiliating that the pagan nations Israel imitated were used as the instruments of God's discipline! The conquerors were now the conquered. They regretted their sufferings, but they did not repent of their sins. They experienced a painful cycle of disobedience, discipline, despair, and deliverance, only to go back into disobedience again.

JUDGES 4

The society of that day was strongly masculine, so it was humiliating when women had leadership in the land (Isa. 3:12). The pages of church history record the names of godly women like Deborah who knew God's will, rallied God's people, and won God's victories; and we are grateful for them.

In Hebrews 11:32, Barak is named as a man of faith, but Deborah enlisted him and saved the day. What a strange victory! God used two women, a jug of milk, a hammer, a tent peg, and a storm (Judg. 5:4-5, 20-21) to defeat the enemy! (See 1 Cor. 1:26-29.)

One person's faith and obedience can make a difference in history. Whether you are a leader like Deborah or a follower like Barak, be sure to be a *believer*; because faith makes the difference between defeat and victory.

JUDGES 5

Deborah and Barak cooperated in fighting the battle and also in praising the Lord (Ps. 149:6). Their song reveals some truths about our spiritual warfare in this world.

Be willing to fight (2, 9). Leaders cannot lead unless soldiers are willing to obey. Are you a willing soldier?

Know that the Lord goes before you (4-5, 31). The God of history can help you do exploits for Him today if you will trust Him and do His will. He is able!

Do not let others discourage you (13-18, 23). Not all the tribes responded with faith and courage; in fact, some refused

to get involved in the battle. Some sacrificed their lives while others stayed home.

Victors turn darkness into light (31). Israel was in despair and darkness before Deborah took over (vv. 6-8), but she brought the dawning of a new day. Are you the kind of soldier who makes a difference in this world?

JUDGES 6

Gideon was an unlikely candidate for God's "Hall of Fame" (Heb. 11:32). When God called him, he was hiding. When God spoke to him, he raised problems instead of trusting promises. One of his favorite words was *if* (vv. 13, 17, 36; Mark 9:22-23). When Gideon did start to obey God, he worked at night (v. 27) and had to have repeated reassurance that the Lord was with him.

"Putting Out the Fleece"

"Putting out the fleece" (asking God to do some special thing to verify His will) is evidence of unbelief and not of faith. God stooped to Gideon's weakness and did what he asked, and He may do that for you; but this is not the level on which God wants to meet you. Immature faith needs signs for reassurance; mature faith takes God at His Word and obeys.

But God saw the potential in Gideon and even called him a "mighty man of valor" (v. 12). God sees the potential in you and says to you as He did to Simon, "You are . . . You shall be" (John 1:42). He knows your weaknesses and will accommodate Himself to your needs so that He might develop your faith.

For a man with a worried heart, "The-LORD-Is-Peace" was just what he needed (v. 24). You can enjoy God's peace today as you fight the battle (Phil. 4:4-9).

JUDGES 7

Imagine 32,000 Israelites facing 135,000 Midianites (Judg. 8:10), but it was the kind of situation that the Lord uses to glorify His name. When God is on your side, the size of the enemy is of no great concern, so keep your eyes on Him.

The really dangerous enemies were within the hearts of Gideon's soldiers. *Fear* was one of them (vv. 1-3), and it sent 22,000 men home (Deut. 20:1-9). *Overconfidence* was another enemy (vv. 4-8). God cut down the ranks from 10,000 to 300 so that the "army" had to trust completely in God. When God strips away your resources, it is not to impoverish your life but to enrich your faith.

Like Joshua, Gideon worshiped God before going to battle (v. 15; Josh. 5:13-15), for he knew the source of his power. God used weak weapons to defeat a great host because Gideon and his men were living by faith: "For nothing restrains the LORD from saving by many or by few" (1 Sam. 14:6).

Tests

We never know when God is using the everyday things of life to test our faith. The men in Gideon's army were tested by the way they drank water. Lot was tested by a disagreement over land (Gen. 13:6ff.). Israel was tested by thirst (Exod. 15:22-27), and Moses was tested by the complaining of the people (Num. 20:1-13). We must constantly be on guard because sometimes we do not know what the lesson was until we have failed the test!

JUDGES 8

It takes all kinds to make a nation (or a church), and a leader must know how to handle each one, especially after a great victory.

The critical (1-3). They were angry with Gideon because they were left out and did not share in the glory. Gideon tactfully gave them the “soft answer” that healed the wounds and prevented division (Prov. 15:1; Eph. 4:1-3). Better to do that than to start another war.

The cynical (4-9). They said, “You have not yet won the battle, so why should we help you?” The men of Succoth had no faith in God or appreciation for Gideon and his men, and their lack of love cost them dearly.

The cowardly (10-21). Executing two famous kings would be a great way to start a military career, but the lad was too immature to carry it out. We wonder if Gideon remembered his own fears and God’s patience with him.

The compromising (22-35). Unlike Abraham, Gideon became covetous and asked for a generous share of the loot (Gen. 14:18-24). This led to idolatry and apostasy because the heart of man is ever ready to indulge in sin.

JUDGES 9

Gideon was a leader called of God, but Abimelech appointed himself and murdered his own brothers to become the leader. Absalom and Adonijah would make this mistake and pay for it dearly (2 Sam. 15; 1 Kings 1:5ff.).

Jotham’s parable reveals that there is a price to pay for true leadership. *Others* had paid the price for Abimelech to rule, but he had sacrificed nothing himself. A true leader must often sacrifice richness (oil), sweetness, and joyfulness to serve the people. But if good men and women will not pay the price and lead, we have to settle for the bramble!

Abimelech’s sin caught up with him, but he certainly did a lot of damage to his family and his people (Ps. 34:21; Prov. 11:3, 19).

JUDGES 10

No great deeds of valor are recorded for either Tola or Jair, but they gave the nation forty-five years of peace. No foreign invaders are named, so these two judges served by solving the internal problems of the nation. They were administrators rather than generals; we need both.

When there are no battles to fight, we tend to take our blessings for granted, which can lead to sin (Deut. 8:7–20). The people forsook God and worshiped the gods of the enemy, and God had to chasten them by an invasion of the Ammonites.

The confession in verse 10 was insincere, born out of suffering; but the confession in verse 15 was sincere because it was accompanied by repentance and a putting away of sin. (See 2 Cor. 7:8–11.) Remorse and regret are not the same as repentance. God is not impressed by hypocritical tears.

JUDGES 11

No person should be blamed for the circumstances surrounding his or her birth. Why permit the things you cannot control to burden your life? Learn to accept them, and the Lord will work out His purposes in His own time (Ps. 139:13–16). Opposition will one day give way to opportunity.

There is every evidence that Jephthah was a sincere worshiper of the Lord. He negotiated with the elders in the hearing of the Lord and he knew the Scriptures. He was a man of faith and courage (Heb. 11:32) who depended on God's power for victory (v. 29).

Jephthah knew that God's law prohibited human sacrifices, and certainly the Lord would not have given victory on the basis of such an offer. Jephthah's daughter was dedicated to serve the Lord at the tabernacle and therefore remained unmarried. As a result, Jephthah had no descendants to carry on his great name. If she had been sacrificed, it is not likely that the maidens would have been allowed to commemorate the event annually, for that would have been imitating the heathen around them.

JUDGES 12

The men of Ephraim could never rejoice in another's victory as long as they were left out (Judg. 8). Jephthah was not as patient and tactful as Gideon, and the result was a civil war that took 42,000 lives. "See how great a forest a little fire kindles!" (James 3:5). Proverbs 17:14 offers good counsel.

The word *shibboleth* is in the English dictionary and means "a test for determining if you belong." If you do not conform

exactly to what a group demands, you are rejected. Some Christians make these minor matters a test of spirituality and fellowship and bring division to the church.

We do not even know where Jephthah was buried! No matter; the Lord keeps the records, and this brave man will get His reward.

JUDGES 13

Samson means "sunny," and initially he did bring sunshine to his home and to Israel at a dark period in their history. But his life ended in the darkness because he did not fully obey the Lord. He *began* to deliver Israel from the Philistines (v. 5), but Samuel and David would finish the job.

How could a man fail when he had so much in his favor? He was born to godly parents who feared the Lord, prayed for wisdom, and obeyed His will. Samson was dedicated to the Lord as a lifelong Nazirite (Num. 6). A godly home is no guarantee of a godly life if the spiritual influence is rejected by the children. The parents were not at fault; Samson was.

He began his ministry blessed by the Lord and closed his life mocked by a heathen crowd. Yes, in Samson's death, he killed many of the enemy, but how much better had he been a *living* sacrifice (Rom. 12:1-2) and not a dead one.

JUDGES 14

Samson's decision, opposed by his parents (Deut. 7:1-4), was used by the Lord in His campaign against the Philistines. When God is not allowed to rule, He will overrule (Prov. 16:33), but that is not an excuse for sin (Rom. 3:8).

Samson's next step of disobedience was in turning aside to contemplate a past victory (Prov. 4:27). The honey was defiled by the carcass, so Samson was defiled when he ate it (Num. 6:6). Beware defiled honey, no matter how sweet it is!

Then Samson defiled his parents by sharing the honey with them, and at the wedding, he made a joke out of the whole experience. His lack of seriousness in obeying the Lord eventually led to his ruin. When all his plans fell apart, he should have turned to the Lord for guidance; instead, he continued on his own determined way.

We may ignore our sins, but our sins will not ignore us. We eventually reap what we sow.

JUDGES 15

When life is motivated by retaliation, the consequences are usually painful. Responding to Samson's anger, his intended father-in-law retaliated by giving away Samson's bride. Then Samson retaliated by burning the Philistines' harvest, and the Philistines in turn burned the bride and her father. Who finally won?

Then the men of Judah became frightened and tried to get Samson out of the way. They would rather compromise with the enemy than declare war. Had Samson been a spiritual man, and not just a fighter, he could have led them forth to victory, but he preferred to work alone and not as the leader of a crusade.

All it took was *thirst* to remind Samson of his weakness and his total dependence on God. Had he prayed as earnestly for character as he did for physical help, he would have been a better man and a more successful judge. Like the prodigal son, he prayed, "Give me!" but he never did pray, "Make me!" (Luke 15:12, 19).

JUDGES 16

Defilement. God had rescued Samson from so many tight places that he was sure he was invulnerable, so he continued to play with sin and defile himself. A Spirit-filled God-called leader has no right doing what Samson did. His body belonged to God (1 Cor. 6:12-20).

Deception. The harlot in Gaza deceived him and so did Delilah. You would think that by then Samson would have been alert to danger, but his conscience was defiled and his moral senses were destroyed. Samson even deceived *himself* by thinking he had everything under control (v. 20), but he was wrong.

Destruction. Someone has said that verse 21 describes the "blinding, binding, and grinding effects of sin." Samson walked in the darkness and died in the darkness. God forgave him and restored his strength, but He did not restore his sight

or his ministry. Samson may have died in victory, but he lived in moral and spiritual defeat. He destroyed God's enemies, but he did not live like God's friend (John 15:14). What a tragedy!

JUDGES 17

There is an old saying: "As goes the home, so goes the nation." If that is true, Israel was in trouble; for everything about this home violated the law of God.

The family was devoted to idolatry. The son had established his own priesthood and was a thief, and the mother was guilty of speaking both curses and blessings (James 3:9-10). She was concerned more about her money than about her son's character.

The Levite was far more guilty than they were because he was especially called of God and was trained in the Law. He was not God's servant; he was a hireling. When offered a better situation by the Danites, he took it!

What a vivid example of Do-It-Yourself Religion! But is the situation any different today? People still ignore Isaiah 8:20 and do what is right in their own eyes.

JUDGES 18

Corruption in the home will eventually spread to society; in this case, it spread to a whole tribe. False doctrine is like yeast: it grows quietly in secret and affects everything it touches (Gal. 5:7-9).

The Danites had claimed their inheritance (Josh. 19:40-48), but the enemy's invasion had forced them to relocate. Had the tribes stayed true to God, the enemy would not have dispossessed them, and they could have enjoyed their inheritance.

What a way to find a new home! The Danites kidnapped the hireling priest of the false religion and stole the idols. Then they killed innocent people who were living in ignorant isolation, a dangerous thing in that day. The climax came when they set up their own center of idolatrous worship, in open disobedience to the Word of God.

They were living in a place where there was "no lack of anything that is on the earth" (v. 10); yet they lacked every-

thing that God wanted to give them from heaven. Their false prosperity gave them false security that could not last.

JUDGES 19

The sad history of Israel moves now from idolatry to immorality and civil war. If sin is not dealt with, it spreads like a plague and destroys. The basic cause of Israel's plight was their independence from God and their indifference to His law. Nothing can be right when every man does what is right in his own eyes. It was a time of moral and spiritual darkness (Isa. 8:20).

The Levite was not a good example of a spiritual leader. He had a concubine, which was permitted and regulated by law but not really approved by God. His main interests were eating, drinking, and enjoying life. Had he been a man of discipline and spiritual wisdom, he would never have caused all the trouble. He had no godly influence on the people whose lives he touched, and his evil treatment of his concubine was inexcusable.

When spiritual leaders fail to obey God and set godly examples, the church and the community suffer, and ultimately the whole nation decays. One incident of lawlessness can cause a national crisis. It makes a difference when God's people are truly salt and light in a decaying and dark society (Matt. 5:13-16).

JUDGES 20

The chapter is a good illustration of James 3:13-18. When we operate on the basis of human wisdom, we create one problem after another, but when we pause to pray and seek the mind of the Lord, He shows us what to do.

The Benjamites did not seek the Lord, admit their guilt, or repent of their sins. There can be no peace unless sin is put away, but the people of Benjamin would not judge their own people in Gibeah. "So shall you put away the evil person from among you" is repeated nine times in Deuteronomy, and God expected His people to obey.

God's people today need to deal with sin in their lives

(2 Cor. 7:1) and in the church family (1 Cor. 5). Unconfessed sin is like uncontrolled disease: it spreads and it kills. Charles Spurgeon said, "Sin is the mother and nurse of all evil, the egg of all mischief, the fountain of all bitterness, the root of misery."

JUDGES 21

After the tumult and the tempers calmed down, the nation discovered that their rash vow had created a new problem: a tribe in Israel was about to become extinct. If the people of Gibeah had dealt with sin as Moses had commanded, all of the trouble would have been avoided. The easy way always becomes the hard way.

The leaders of Israel became peacemakers (v. 13), and the tribes began working together to solve the problem. Their solution was a matter of semantics: Israel had vowed not to *give* them wives, but that did not prevent the men of Benjamin from going out and *taking* wives.

The apostle Paul came from the tribe of Benjamin. No doubt he was grateful for those four hundred women from Jabesh Gilead (v. 12) and the two hundred women who were kidnapped at Shiloh, for they kept the tribe alive.

RUTH

It seems incredible that this beautiful love story could occur during the dark days of the judges, but such is the grace of God. We are living in trying days today; yet God is at work in His world, getting a bride for His Son and accomplishing His eternal purposes. Never permit the bad news of man's sin to rob you of the good news of God's love and grace.

You see the providence of God at work in the lives of Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz, and you see another important link in the genealogy of the Savior. In Ruth 4:17, David is mentioned for the first time in the Bible.

The four chapters of Ruth are four acts in a drama: (1) tears, (2) toil, (3) trust, and (4) triumph. The book begins with funerals and ends with a wedding. Naomi moves from bitterness to blessedness, and Ruth moves from loneliness to love. What a picture of the grace of God!

RUTH 1

Naomi and her husband sinned when they left Judah for enemy country. Better to be hungry in the will of God than to have a full stomach and be out of His will. They planned to stay in Moab a short time, but their "sojourn" was long enough for their sons to marry. Then the sons and father died. You can run away from famine, but you cannot escape death.

Naomi sinned by urging her daughters-in-law to go home. She did not want to take two Moabite women back to Bethlehem with her and reveal the family's disobedience to God (Deut. 23:3). Imagine a Jewess sending them back to their false gods! But Ruth had come to trust in the God of Israel (vv. 16-17; 2:12), and she refused to go back.

Naomi sinned by getting bitter and blaming God for her

plight. *Naomi* means “pleasant” and *Mara* means “bitter.” But it was her decision to go to Moab, so why blame God? A “root of bitterness” can poison your life and the people around you (Deut. 29:18; Heb. 12:15), so avoid carrying grudges.

Although God does not prevent the painful consequences of our sins, He does overrule so that His purposes are fulfilled. By the grace of God, Naomi’s emptiness will become fullness, and her sorrow will turn to joy.

RUTH 2

Ruth was a young believer, but she knew enough of the Word to understand that she was permitted to glean in the fields during the harvest (Lev. 19:9–10). She trusted the God who was concerned about widows and the poor (Exod. 22:22; Deut. 10:18), and He did not fail. When we trust God and obey Him, He begins to work on our behalf (Prov. 3:5–6).

Under His Wings (Ruth 2:12)

This image refers to the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle, where the wings of the cherubim overshadowed the mercy seat (Exod. 25:17–22). To be under His wings means to be in the place of security and fellowship with God (Pss. 36:7–8; 61:4; 91:1–4). Believers should abide in Him (John 15:1–10) and enter into the Holy of Holies (Heb. 10:19–25). God’s people are “outside the camp” (Heb. 13:13) but living “inside the veil” in the Holy of Holies.

There were at least two men in Bethlehem who could permanently deliver Ruth and Naomi from their poverty and loneliness, and God providentially led Ruth to the field of one of them, Boaz. (See Ps. 25:9; Isa. 42:16.) It was not the bitterness

of Naomi but the faithfulness of Ruth that changed the picture.

Boaz protected Ruth and provided for her even before she discovered who he was. (On his part, it was probably love at first sight!) Instead of living on leftovers, Ruth became a friend of "the lord of the harvest" who gave her generous gifts. Can you see in all of this a picture of what Christ has done for His own?

RUTH 3

Naomi got rid of her bitterness and began to think of others. She told Ruth how to approach Boaz, her kinsman-redeemer (Lev. 25:23-55). He was a near relative who was able to redeem, but was he *willing* to redeem? Ruth would find out that night.

The Kinsman- Redeemer (Lev. 25: 23-55)

This law helped to protect the poor from being exploited and the rich from taking property from one tribe to another. The redeemer had to be a near kinsman who was able to redeem and willing to redeem. He was not obligated to do so, but it was expected of him. To refuse was to hurt the family and tribe as well as his own reputation. By being born at Bethlehem, Jesus Christ became our near kinsman. He was able to save and willing to save; He saves all who will put their trust in Him.

She was already under the Lord's wings (2:12), but she requested to be under the wing of Boaz (v. 9). He was only too happy to comply! Up to that point, Ruth was doing all the work, but then Boaz went to work for Ruth (v. 18). It was time for Ruth to rest and wait, trusting her kinsman-redeemer.

Ruth is a good example for us to follow when we have needs to be met. She listened to instructions (vv. 1–4), obeyed (vv. 5–9), believed what her redeemer said (vv. 10–14), received his gifts (vv. 15–17), and waited in patience for him to do the rest (v. 18). When you are at the feet of your Redeemer, you have nothing to fear.

RUTH 4

Five times in the first two verses we read about people *sitting down*. It was to be a deliberate and final transaction; Boaz was to pay the price to redeem Ruth. When our Savior finished the work of redemption, He sat down (Mark 16:19; Heb. 1:3; see also John 19:30).

Boaz planned the marriage privately but paid the price publicly. The other kinsman was able to redeem but not willing. He was afraid of harming his own inheritance. Jesus has made us a part of His inheritance (Eph. 1:11–14). What a contrast between chapters 1–2 and chapter 4: from tears to joy, from hard labor to rest, from emptiness to fullness, from fear to peace and assurance. And the thing that made the difference was *obeying the Word of God*. When Ruth put herself at the feet of her redeemer and entrusted herself to him, he took over and changed everything.

In chapter 1, Ruth had nothing but her faith. In chapter 2, she lived on leftovers, and in chapter 3, she received generous gifts. But once she belonged to Boaz, *everything he owned belonged to her*. Ponder Ephesians 1:3 and 2 Corinthians 8:9.

THE BOOKS OF SAMUEL

Three men are the center of attention in these books: Samuel (1 Sam. 1–7), Saul (1 Sam. 8–15) and David (1 Sam. 16–2 Sam. 24). Their careers overlap, of course, as the story of Israel's monarchy unfolds.

Samuel was the last of the judges, and Saul was the first of the kings. However, Saul was never meant to establish the dynasty because he was from the wrong tribe (Gen. 49:10). God chose David, from the tribe of Judah, to be His ruler. Saul was given to the people as a discipline because they rejected the Lord to have a king like other nations (Hos. 13:11).

These books show the hand of God at work in the affairs of men and nations. Men are free to make decisions, but God still guides and sees to it that His purposes are fulfilled.

1 SAMUEL



1 SAMUEL 1

Grace. The name *Hannah* means “grace,” and she needed God’s grace to handle her burdens. Unfortunately, the home was divided, her rival provoked her, and she was childless. Out of this kind of sorrow and disappointment, God often builds great faith and sends special blessings. (See 1 Pet. 5:10.)

Faith. When you consider her situation at home and also the way Eli treated her, you find it remarkable that Hannah had any faith at all. But she did not become bitter against God, as Naomi had done (Ruth 1:19–22), nor did she create problems in the home. She asked God for a son, and God answered her prayer. No wonder Samuel (“heard by God”) was a great man of prayer. Look at the mother God gave him!

Obedience. Hannah’s vow was not a “bargain” with the Lord but an expression of devotion: she would *give* her first-born to God and not redeem him with a sacrifice (Exod. 13:11–16). A mother’s prayers and a father’s encouragement (vv. 21–23, 28) changed the destiny of an entire nation. Never underestimate the power of prayer or the value of one godly home.

1 SAMUEL 2

Singing (1–11). Most people would sing if they could *keep* their son, but Hannah sang because she could *give* her son to the service of the Lord. She glorified the Lord who does great things for His people. Mary’s song is similar to Hannah’s (Luke 1:46–55) because Mary had also made a sacrifice to the Lord (Luke 1:38). First the sacrifice, then the song (2 Chron. 29:27).

Sinning (12-17, 22-36). Eli had lost his influence over his sons and as a result caused his family to lose the priesthood (1 Kings 2:26-27, 35). (See 1 Tim. 3:4-5.) It has well been said that the greatest evil comes from the corruption of the greatest good, and Eli's sons illustrate this truth.

Serving (18-21). Blessed are those parents who realize that their children are growing and facing new needs and struggles, and blessed are those children who grow "before the Lord" (Luke 2:52). God kept Samuel pure in the midst of a defiled environment because he had parents who loved him and prayed for him. Jesus has a special love for children, and we must love them, too.

Children

Children are a gift from God (Gen. 48:8-9), a heritage and a reward (Ps. 127:3), weapons to use in fighting the enemy (Ps. 127:4-5), a source of joy (Ps. 113:9), and a crown in their parents' old age (Prov. 17:6). It is a serious thing to abuse children (Matt. 18:1-6) or to neglect their spiritual training (Eph. 6:1-4). Christian witness is always one generation short of extinction. If we fail to train the children for Christ, we forfeit the future.

1 SAMUEL 3

Sanctity. A godly life can develop in spite of ungodly influences surrounding it. So it was with Moses in Egypt, Daniel in Babylon, and our Lord in Nazareth. Samuel was not isolated, but he was separated. He belonged to the Lord. Daily, he was in contact with sin, and yet he was not contaminated by it. He was a "living sacrifice" and experienced God's transforming power (Rom. 12:1-2).

Authority. Even though Eli was not the most godly example or mentor, young Samuel submitted to his authority. We submit to man's authority "for the Lord's sake" (1 Pet. 2:13-25), for we serve God, not men. We trust Him to protect us and work out His will even in the lives of ungodly people.

Fidelity. God gave His message to Samuel because He knew Samuel was faithful. The lad was accustomed to being alert to Eli's voice and to obeying immediately, so when God spoke, Samuel was ready. Being faithful in a few small things prepares you for bigger things (Matt. 25:21). Hearing the voice of God did not keep Samuel from doing the work of God (v. 15); he went right back to the old tasks. The nation would now listen to Samuel's words, for they knew he was God's spokesman.

1 SAMUEL 4

Three tragedies are recorded here.

Defeat. Eli's two sons wanted God's help but not God's holiness. They wanted God for the crisis experiences of life but not in their daily ministry (1 Sam. 2:12-17). They thought that the presence of the ark would assure victory, but their superstitious faith had no foundation. Beware "using" God to solve your problems if your life is not yielded to Him.

Naming the Baby

Would you want your name to be Ichabod, "Where is the glory"? Or Ben-Oni, "Son of my sorrow" (Gen. 35:16-20)? Or Jabez, "He will cause pain" (1 Chron. 4:9-10)? Or Beriah, "Tragedy" (1 Chron. 7:23)? Our first birth identifies us with defeat, but the new birth identifies us with victory (1 John 5:1-5). When you trust Jesus Christ, your life changes in many wonderful ways.

Death. The bad news from the battlefield brought death to Eli and his daughter-in-law. In Eli's case, it was a judgment from God; in the mother's case, it was the result of her burden for the glory of God. Phinehas was an ungodly man, but his wife must have been a godly woman to speak as she did.

Departure. The glory of God dwelt with Israel (Exod. 40:34–35; Rom. 9:4), but their sin forced God to depart at an hour when they most needed Him (Ps. 78:56–64). Israel had neither the ark nor the glory of God; they were naked before their enemies. Had they been concerned about God's glory, they would have repented of their sins and obeyed Him, but it was too late.

1 SAMUEL 5

The glory may have departed from Israel, but God was still in control and well able to defend His name. If you get depressed because the enemy seems to have “captured” the glory, rest assured that God is still on the throne.

God can reveal His glory even in a heathen temple, and all false gods must fall before Him. How much better it would have been for His glory to be revealed on the battlefield, but He could not give victory to a disobedient people. It would only have encouraged them more in their sin.

Instead of confessing their sin and trusting the true God of Israel, the people of Philistia tried to get rid of the ark. What a great opportunity they were passing by! But then, would you want to trust the god of the defeated enemy? Israel was a poor witness to the other nations, so they rejected Israel's God.

1 SAMUEL 6

God chastened the Philistines because they kept the ark, but He killed some of His own people because they looked into the ark (v. 19). The Israelites knew the Law (Num. 4:15, 20) and therefore were more responsible than the Philistines. Curiosity is important to learning and progress, but it is unwise to be unduly curious about holy things.

The men of Beth Shemesh were reaping the harvest when the cart with the ark came into view. The ark had been gone

for six months, but the men did not allow that to keep them from working. Even in times of defeat, there are jobs to be done and people to feed.

Abinadab's house will become a tabernacle of the Lord, but should not every home be a holy dwelling-place for Him? (See Isa. 4:4-5.)

1 SAMUEL 7

Cleaning up. The ark had been returned to Israel, but Israel had not returned to the Lord, so Samuel called them to repentance. They put away their foreign gods and then met at Mizpah to renew their covenant with the Lord. For years, God had been preparing Samuel for this strategic ministry, and he rescued the nation.

Looking up. The Philistines thought that the assembly at Mizpah was preparation for war; however, Israel was not equipped for battle. But God's people use spiritual weapons to defeat the enemy: Samuel prayed, and God sent the enemy back in confusion. Samuel was born in answer to prayer, and he lived in dependence on prayer.

Setting up. *Ebenezer* means "stone of help." It was a memorial to God's helping His people from the beginning to that very day. Missionary J. Hudson Taylor had a plaque in his home that read, EBENEZER and JEHOVAH-JIREH. That means, "Thus far the Lord has helped us—The Lord will see to it." This takes care of the past and the future, so why worry about the present? God is in control!

1 SAMUEL 8

It is possible to be faithful in ministry and yet close your life in disappointment. That is what happened to Samuel.

He was disappointed in his sons. They were not able to carry on their father's ministry because they did not follow their father's godly example. Eli's sons yielded to the lusts of the flesh (1 Sam. 2:12-17), while Samuel's sons were lovers of money.

He was disappointed in the nation, for they wanted a king. They used Samuel's sons as their excuse, but the real reason was their lack of faith in God. They wanted to be like the other

nations and have a king lead them out to battle. Samuel's warnings about what the king would do made no impression on the people. Note the repetition of the phrase "he will take."

He was disappointed in King Saul who rebelled against God and forfeited the crown. Much that Samuel worked for and prayed for seems to have turned out differently from what he expected, and yet he remained faithful to the Lord to the end. Leaders who are faithful to God may not always appear successful to men.

1 SAMUEL 9

The donkey was a prized animal (Job 1:3) and was used by royalty (1 Kings 1:33-34), but would you expect to find a nation's first king out looking for lost donkeys? Saul's obedience to his father, his concern for his father (v. 5), and his willingness to persevere in a hard task seemed to indicate character and future success.

How strange that Saul did not know about Samuel, and how disappointing that the only reason they visited Samuel was to find their lost animals! People often "use" religion to solve their problems and not to strengthen their character or overcome their sins.

Nevertheless, God used all of this to bring Saul to Samuel. Faithfulness in a small task led Saul to a new friend, a new calling and a new opportunity to serve God. Had he remained a humble servant, things would have been different in his life and in Israel (v. 21; 1 Sam. 15:17). But good beginnings are no guarantee of good endings.

1 SAMUEL 10

Saul could not understand how a man like him could lead the nation of Israel, so God gave him a series of "signs" to assure him for his new responsibilities.

A leader must trust God to solve problems (vv. 1-2), to provide needs (vv. 3-4), and to give the power needed for service (vv. 5-7). He must know how to hear God's Word and wait obediently on the Lord (v. 8). Saul began his ministry in the strength of these assurances, but as time went on, he trusted more and more in himself and rebelled against God's Word.

His modesty in saying nothing about the kingdom (v. 16) and his self-control in not answering his critics (v. 27) are commendable, but what about his hiding on coronation day? Was he genuinely humble, or was he unwilling to take responsibility? This much is sure: he did a great deal of “hiding” in the years of his leadership, but God found him out. As the book of Proverbs warns, “He who covers his sins will not prosper” (28:13).

1 SAMUEL 11

It is one thing to have authority and ability, but quite something else to prove yourself a leader. People respond to a crisis in different ways: some give in (vv. 1–3), but others give up (v. 4). Saul responded with anger and action and rallied the troops for battle.

God empowered Saul to fight the battle and win (v. 6). He had *stature* as well as authority; he had proved himself a leader. But it can be as dangerous after the victory as it is during the battle, for Saul was tempted to get rid of his critics (vv. 12–13; see also 1 Sam. 10:27). He gave God the glory and did not use his authority and success as weapons to attack his own people.

Samuel had the right idea: it was time to renew their covenant with the Lord; and again, the nation met at historic Gilgal. Do the crises God permits in your life strengthen your faith? Do you use the victories He gives to glorify Him and help others?

1 SAMUEL 12

Samuel’s message was the combination of a coronation address, a revival sermon, and a farewell speech. He pointed out the greatness of their sin in asking for a king and then called for new dedication. A key theme in the address is *witness* (vv. 3, 5).

The witness of a godly leader (1–5). The people had rejected a proven godly leader for a man who had won only one victory and whose devotion to the Lord was as yet unknown. Samuel was disappointed, but he left office knowing that his conscience was clear.

The witness of history (6-15). The hand of the Lord was with them when they obeyed, but it was against them when they rebelled. Verse 14 emphasizes the same secret of success that God gave to Joshua (Josh. 1:8). Rebellion became King Saul's besetting sin, and it cost him the kingdom (1 Sam. 15:23).

The witness of God's power (16-18). What a man of prayer Samuel was, for it was most unusual to have thunder and rain at that time of year.

The witness of the covenant (19-25). The people had forsaken God, but He would not forsake them, for He is true to His Word. They had the assurance of God's faithfulness as well as the prayers and ministry of Samuel. Had the king maintained his friendship with Samuel and obeyed the Word, he would have led the nation to victory.

1 SAMUEL 13

Saul's second crisis came after he started to build a standing army, and he failed in four ways in this crisis.

He failed to *act decisively* (vv. 1-4). It was Jonathan, not Saul, who declared war by attacking one of the Philistine garrisons. Saul took the credit and blew the trumpet to rally the people.

Excuses

Evangelist Billy Sunday defined an excuse as "the skin of a reason stuffed with a lie." Benjamin Franklin said, "I never knew a man who was good at making excuses who was good at anything else." Adam made the first excuse for sin (Gen. 3:12), and many have followed his bad example. Excuses only make matters worse.

He failed to *inspire the people* (vv. 5-7). Some ran away, some hid, and some left the country! (People still dodge mili-

tary service in the same ways.) Those who were faithful were fearful and the future looked bleak.

He failed to *wait* (vv. 8–9; see also 1 Sam. 10:8). This was the first step in his rupture with Samuel and his rebellion against the Lord. Patience is a mark of character, and Saul's character was weak (James 1:1–8).

He failed to *tell the truth* (vv. 10–15). When David sinned, he came with confessions; when Saul sinned, he had only excuses. He lied to his best friend, and it cost him his crown. *And Saul would do it again* (1 Sam. 15:15). From that point, his course was downhill.

1 SAMUEL 14

Jonathan, not Saul, was the true leader in Israel. The contrast between the two is striking. Saul was sitting while Jonathan was attacking the enemy. Saul trusted his growing army, but Jonathan trusted God and did not depend on numbers (v. 6). Saul *watched* things happen, but Jonathan *made* things happen.

Saul tried to impress people with an oath, but Jonathan did what was necessary to fight the battle. Saul weakened the army; Jonathan strengthened the army and challenged it to new victories.

Saul was great on words but weak on deeds. (See Matt. 7:21–29.)

1 SAMUEL 15

God's orders were clear, but Saul's motives were mixed (James 1:8). Look at the losses Saul incurred because he disobeyed God's word.

He lost his *character*, for he lied to Samuel and tried to blame the people. Saul was very good at excuses.

He lost his *friend* Samuel (v. 35) who had anointed him, taught him, and prayed for him.

He lost his *crown*. God took the kingdom from Saul and gave it to David.

Saul had many advantages as he began his reign, but he failed God and the people because he did not cultivate his spiritual life. He became proud (vv. 12, 17); he feared men

rather than God (v. 24); he blamed others for his own sins (v. 21); and he was concerned more about his reputation than about his character (v. 30). He tried to substitute sacrifice for obedience, but God rejected him.

Is there a King Agag in your life?

**Obedience,
Not
Sacrifice**

God's people face the constant temptation of substituting religious ritual for spiritual reality. Samuel's words (1 Sam. 15: 22-23) do not belittle sacrifices. Rather, they point out that the condition of the heart determines the value of the sacrifice (Ps. 51:16-17). God is not enriched by our gifts (Ps. 50:12-14), but we are enriched if our gifts to Him are backed by obedient hearts (Hos. 6:6; Mic. 6:7-8). He accepts the worship only if He can accept the worshiper (Isa. 1:10ff.).

1 SAMUEL 16

Reject what God rejects. You expect Samuel to mourn over Saul and his sin (1 Cor. 5:1-2), but mourning alone will not solve problems. There comes a time for action (Josh. 7:10ff.).

See as God sees. How strange that Samuel had not learned his lesson after the failure of Saul (1 Sam. 9:2; 10:23-24). God told Samuel that He would tell him the man of His choice (v. 3), but the old man was tempted to run ahead of the Lord. The heart determines the life (Prov. 4:23), and only God can see the heart (Acts 1:24-25).

Let God do the rest. Samuel anointed David to be king and then departed from Bethlehem, for his work there was done. How would a shepherd boy get from the fields to the throne? That was not Samuel's responsibility; God would see to it. God used David's musical skill to bring him into the king's pres-

ence. Empowered by the Spirit (v. 13), David had nothing to fear.

(The ominous statement in v. 14 should be compared with David's prayer in Ps. 51:11.)

God Sees the Heart

God not only sees our hearts, but He searches them (1 Chron. 28:9) and knows our thoughts and motives (Heb. 4:12–13). We think we know our own hearts, but we do not (Jer. 17:9), so we had better accept God's verdict. We should be careful not to judge others since we cannot know their hearts (John 7:24; 1 Cor. 4:5).

1 SAMUEL 17

Opportunities. God had prepared David for this occasion, for the private victories make possible the public victories (vv. 34–37). A seemingly trivial errand led to a challenging situation that brought glory to God and recognition to David. Be prepared; you never know when your opportunity will come.

Saul was losing strength, but David was growing in power; and Saul's diminishment would continue until Saul's tragic death. Saul stood head and shoulders above everybody else, but he was not big enough to meet Goliath. David was a man of faith, and God gave him spiritual stature. Great faith makes great men and women. David's only desire was to glorify the God of Israel (vv. 45–47).

Obstacles. Whenever you step out by faith, other people will often put obstacles in your way. David's brother ridiculed him (v. 28) and Saul bluntly told David, "You are not able!" (v. 33). Then Saul said, "If you must do it, do it my way," and he encumbered David with his heavy armor. David had to ignore the obstacles and keep his faith in the Lord. He had to do God's work in the way God wanted him to do it.

David and the Lord Jesus

David is a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of David. He was born in Bethlehem and misunderstood by his family; he was an obedient son and a conquering hero. The name David means "beloved," and Jesus is the Father's "beloved Son" (Matt. 3:17). David was anointed king long before he took the throne and ruled, and our Lord is King of kings even though He is not yet reigning on this earth. Like David, our Lord has had to experience rejection and exile before reigning.

1 SAMUEL 18

As you read the history of Saul, you often find him with a spear in his hand. It was his symbol of authority and power, and he did not want anybody to forget that he was in charge. David had a harp in his hand—or a shepherd's crook or a sling or a sword. Whatever task God had for him to do, David was available to do it, and God received the glory.

When you are jealous over your authority and position, as Saul was, you become envious of others and sensitive to what people are saying about you. Saul became almost paranoid about David. First he was envious of David, then suspicious and afraid, then angry, and finally so hateful that he wanted to kill him.

In that difficult situation, David acted with wisdom from God and trusted God to help him. David never considered Saul his enemy, which kept David in the place of God's blessing. David remained a humble servant in spite of his great victories, for he knew that God's anointing was upon him. God used those difficult experiences of conflict to help make David a great man of faith.

1 SAMUEL 19

David was in constant danger, but God protected him, sometimes providentially (v. 10) and sometimes through the ministry of others. When the battles were all ended, David wrote, "He delivered me because He delighted in me" (Ps. 18:19). David's integrity before God was his strongest weapon during those years of persecution from Saul. You cannot control what people do to you, but you can control what you do with God.

Jonathan was David's dearest friend, and he kept David informed of Saul's plans. Faith in God does not exclude a commonsense approach to life. Michal, Saul's daughter, risked her life to protect her husband, and until the day of his death, Samuel stood by David.

The "ultimate weapon" of the believer is spiritual, the power of God at work changing people (vv. 18–24; 2 Cor. 10:3–6). Had Saul repented and yielded himself to the Lord, he would have saved himself and his family a great deal of sorrow and trouble.

1 SAMUEL 20

It has well been said that faith is living without scheming. In the midst of the trials of life, we must beware lest we become weary, stop trusting God, and start scheming. We may be inclined to judge David, but perhaps we have done some scheming ourselves.

David and Jonathan lied to Saul, and it almost cost Jonathan his life. Jonathan had been altogether too optimistic about his father, and this experience helped to open his eyes. Jonathan tried to mediate between David and Saul instead of taking his stand with God's anointed. After all, as far as God was concerned, Saul was a "has been" (v. 13).

Jonathan was also concerned about the future of his family (vv. 15, 42). David's promise to spare Jonathan's family made it possible for Mephibosheth to live (2 Sam. 9).

1 SAMUEL 21

Departure. David lived as an exile for about ten years, during which time Saul tried to kill him and Saul's followers lied

about him. Many people in Israel actually believed that David was a rebel against the king and that David was trying to destroy Saul. David had to leave his reputation with God and trust Him to silence the accusers.

Deception. It is disappointing to see David depending on lies for protection. He lied to the priest and to the king, but he could not lie to Doeg: "For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light" (Luke 16:8). Whenever you think you have "pulled off" a smart deal, you will find a Doeg ready to give you trouble (1 Sam. 22:9ff.; see also Ps. 52).

"Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who deal truthfully are His delight" (Prov. 12:22).

Is It Ever Right to Lie?

Scripture commands us to tell the truth and warns about the consequences of lying. Jesus is our example, for there was no deceit in His mouth (1 Pet. 2:22). We must always speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15). If our telling the truth endangers others, silence is our best response. When David ran ahead of God, he found himself in trouble and lied. The safest thing is to stay away from those situations and to pray, "Lead us not into temptation."

1 SAMUEL 22

What a motley group gathered around the exiled king (1 Cor. 1:26-30)! A. W. Tozer used to say, "Don't follow any leader until you see the mark of the oil on his forehead." David had the anointing of God, and he represented the future in Israel. Yes, he made mistakes and was sometimes discouraged, but he was God's man and God used him.

Contrast Saul's approach to leadership. He could not chal-

lenge his men to a holy cause, so he tried to bribe them (v. 7) and play on their sympathy (v. 8). He depended on spies like Doeg, and he was not afraid to murder innocent priests just to let people know who was in charge. Saul was unwilling to kill the wicked Amalekites, but he murdered God's priests. Saul was fighting a losing battle, and he was desperate.

God in His providence gave David two great gifts: the ephod (1 Sam. 23:6) and a priest. He could always seek the will of the Lord as he planned his strategy. You have the Word of God and an interceding High Priest in heaven. Do you seek the mind of the Lord as you make decisions?

1 SAMUEL 23

Guidance. A gifted leader like David might have been tempted to depend on his experience; instead, he turned to the Lord for the guidance he needed. Even the counsel of his men did not sway him once he knew the mind of the Lord.

Treachery. David rescued the citizens of Keilah, yet they planned to turn him and his men over to Saul! Do not expect everybody you help to appreciate what you have done. Do you appreciate what others have done for you?

Love. Although his father was out to kill David, Jonathan was brave enough to visit David and encourage him. That is what friendship is all about (Prov. 17:17). How tragic that Jonathan's hopes for the future were destroyed by his father's sins, but at least Jonathan was willing to be second man.

Providence. Ziph belonged to Judah (Josh. 15:24), so the citizens should have been loyal to David. They were obviously trying to curry favor with Saul, and they did not believe that David was their future king. God used an invasion of the Philistines to rescue David when it looked as if Saul's forces would win. No matter what men may do, God works out His purposes, and His providence does not fail.

1 SAMUEL 24

Circumstances. People interpret events differently, depending on what they have in their hearts. Saul thought circumstances were safe, so he laid aside his spear and went into the cave. David's men saw a great opportunity for David to

avenge himself, but David saw an opportunity to show mercy (Matt. 5:10–12; Rom. 12:17–21). David may have been Saul's enemy, but Saul was not David's enemy (v. 19). Compare verse 5 with 1 Samuel 15:27. Another tear in the robe.

Conscience. David's conscience was so tender that he was troubled after he cut off a corner of Saul's robe. He was humiliating the king, and David knew what it meant to respect authority. A sensitive conscience is a great treasure and a valuable guide. Don't lose it!

Cowardice. Saul's tears were superficial and his conviction temporary; otherwise, he would have welcomed David and transferred the monarchy to him. He knew that David would be king, but he opposed it as long as he could. His greatest concern was that David spare his descendants, which David promised to do. However, it was Saul's sins, not David's revenge, that destroyed his family.

1 SAMUEL 25

These events remind us we can live on several levels.

We can return evil for good. Nabal did that when he refused to share his food with David's men. His name means "fool," and that is exactly what he was (Prov. 17:13).

We can return evil for evil. David planned to do that before he was stopped. It is the natural thing to do because most of the world lives that way, and our hurt feelings cry out for revenge. And yet David had just shown mercy to Saul who had treated him far worse than had Nabal! How easy it is to lose perspective in the heat of anger.

We can overcome evil with good. God used Abigail to prevent David from becoming a murderer. She reminded David of Nabal's true character (vv. 23–25) and of David's efforts to do God's work (vv. 26–29). She also told him he would suffer when he remembered the incident in the future (vv. 30–31). This is good counsel to heed the next time you consider seeking revenge. Ponder Proverbs 20:22 and 24:29.

1 SAMUEL 26

Saul's tearful words did not mean much, for he continued to pursue David. In His mercy, God gave Saul another oppor-

tunity to repent, but the king's heart was too hard. Even while he slept, Saul kept his spear next to him to remind everybody that he was king. David took the spear from him, a significant action.

Abishai, David's nephew, was a brave man; but brave men are not always wise. He said, "You missed your first opportunity, so don't miss this one!" But David knew that God's hand, not his own, would have to strike Saul.

David's speech was designed to make Saul examine his heart. Was Saul chasing David because God told him to do so, or because he believed the lies his flattering officers told about David? Twice before, Saul had said "I have sinned" (1 Sam. 15:24, 30), but his words were not sincere then or on this occasion. He was correct when he called himself a fool. He was a fool in the way he treated Jonathan, David, Samuel, his army, his nation, and his God. He lived like a fool, and he died like a fool. (See Proverbs 26:11-12.)

♦ *"I Have Sinned!"*

King Saul is not the only one who made this confession. Pharaoh said it (Exod. 9:27) and so did Balaam (Num. 22:34), Achan (Josh. 7:20), David (2 Sam. 12:13; 24:10, 17; Ps. 51:4), Judas (Matt. 27:4), and the prodigal son (Luke 15:18, 21). Which of these men do you think were really sincere?

♦ 1 SAMUEL 27

David won a great victory over Saul, only to be overwhelmed by despair. Such feelings are not unusual; you cannot have mountaintops without valleys. However, when you are feeling low, it is a dangerous thing to "talk to yourself" and make important decisions. David should have talked to the Lord. He and Abiathar could have sought the mind of God together.

David made some foolish decisions because he did not pause to inquire of the Lord. He stopped serving God and started thinking about survival: "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it" (Mark 8:35). He trusted the enemy for protection and did not trust the Lord. As a result, he had to scheme, kill, and lie to survive.

When you are discouraged, ask a trusted Christian friend to pray with you, and seek the Lord's direction. Take time to talk about your feelings with your friend. You will gain a clearer perspective. *Make no impulsive decisions about significant matters.* Follow this advice: "Wait on the LORD; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart" (Ps. 27:14).

“When the outlook is discouraging, try the uplook!”

1 SAMUEL 28

Saul had been fighting the wrong enemy for so long that when the real enemy appeared, the king was unprepared. God was not with him, and prayer was not answered (Prov. 1:20-33). When Saul began his reign, it was "the dawning of the day" (1 Sam. 9:26), but now he was walking in the darkness. Saul did not disguise himself (v. 8); *he revealed his true self*. Throughout his reign, he had been pretending, and the truth was coming out.

Depending on demonic forces, the medium planned to impersonate Samuel, but the Lord permitted Samuel to appear. The friend Saul grieved in life, he called for in death. Too late do we learn to appreciate those who tried to help us. Too late do we humble ourselves.

Saul's disobedience in the past led to darkness in the present and defeat and death in the future. When God gave him opportunities to repent, he ignored them. He did not "seek the LORD while He may be found" (Isa. 55:6).

Christians and the Occult

God forbade Israel to dabble in the occult (Exod. 22:18; Lev. 19:31; 20:6; Deut. 18:9–14), and these warnings should be heeded today, too. Sorcery is one of the works of the flesh that must be rejected (Gal. 5:20). Both Peter (Acts 8:9ff.) and Paul (Acts 13:6ff.) had harsh words for sorcerers. Seemingly innocent games that border on the occult can open the door to serious problems. As for seances, read what see Isaiah 8:19 has to say.

1 SAMUEL 29

David was out of place, but God in His mercy cared for him. This is an encouragement to us when we sin, but it must not become an excuse for sin. That would be tempting God.

The king never once detected what was going on, so David must have been a gifted actor. However, what value is there in being successful at deception? Hypocrisy and lying destroyed King Saul.

The Lord used the song that got David into trouble with Saul (1 Sam. 18:7–9) to get him out of trouble with the Philistines. Saul was not David's enemy, and David did not want to meet him on the battlefield and fight against his own people. But when you fraternize with the enemy, you create difficult problems. Let us be grateful for Psalm 103:10–14.

1 SAMUEL 30

Relieved that he had been discharged from the war, David returned to Ziklag only to find tragedy. There are times when one problem follows hard on another. Had Saul slain the Amalekites as God commanded (1 Sam. 15), this raid would not

have occurred. *Our* disobedience can cause problems for *others*.

A crisis does not make a person: it shows what a person is made of. Like his men, David wept and sorrowed, but unlike some of his men, he did not look for a scapegoat. In times of crisis, express your feelings honestly, but do not look for somebody to blame. Rather, get your strength from the Lord (v. 6) and seek His will (vv. 7-8). He is in complete control.

God uses the weak things of the world, even a sick boy who was left to die. When we do the possible, God does the impossible. The tragedy became victory, with profit for everybody.

1 SAMUEL 31

Defeat. David won a battle and divided the spoils; Saul lost a battle and was stripped by the enemy. Gideon camped near Gilboa before his great victory over the Midianites (Judg. 7:1), but Gilboa would forever be associated with the defeat of Saul. Are you leaving behind monuments to victory or to defeat?

Death. Death reigned over Israel: their soldiers died, Saul and his armorbearer died, and Saul's sons died. Such is the high cost of one man's rebellion: "For to be carnally minded is death" (Rom. 8:6).

Disgrace. Had Israel won, God would have been glorified. Instead, the pagan idols were honored, and the dead were desecrated. It is bad enough to die in a losing battle, but not to be buried was an even greater disgrace.

Devotion. The brave men of Jabesh Gilead risked their lives to give Saul and his sons a decent burial. After all, Saul had rescued their city forty years before, and they were showing their gratitude (1 Sam. 11:1-11). David later honored them for their feat (2 Sam. 2:4-7).

2 SAMUEL

David the king is the central figure in this book that records his national victories (chaps. 1–10) and his personal defeats (chaps. 11–24). The turning point is his sin of adultery (chap. 11), the tragic consequences of which affected both his family and the nation. David confessed his sins, submitted to God's discipline, and spent the closing years of his reign preparing for the building of the temple. This book is an exposition of Proverbs 14:34 and 28:13.

2 SAMUEL 1

Saul began his career *standing* (1 Sam. 10:23), but he closed his career *falling* (vv. 4, 10, 12, 19, 25, 27): "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12). Natural abilities and great opportunities do not guarantee success. Saul was head and shoulders above everybody else, but he was not heart and soul yielded to God. Robert Murray M'Cheyne said, "It is not great talents God blesses so much as great likeness to Jesus."

The Amalekite tried to deceive David and win his favor, for his account contradicts the inspired record (1 Sam. 31). He did not know David! Saul was not David's enemy, so David could not rejoice over Israel's inglorious defeat. Do you have enemies whose sorrows make you happy? If you do, carefully consider Proverbs 24:17 and Romans 12:14–15.

David said only good things about Saul and praised him as a mighty warrior. Saul's treatment of David had been diabolical, but David's treatment of Saul was always kind and considerate (Lev. 19:18; Prov. 20:22; 24:29). Saul listened to men's lies and lost his crown; David obeyed God's Word and gained a kingdom.

2 SAMUEL 2

David's tribe of Judah anointed him king and set up his headquarters in Hebron. But Abner, Saul's cousin (1 Sam. 14:50) and commander of his army, made Saul's son king in open defiance of God's will. Whenever we fail to submit to God's will, we cause division and bring destruction (James 3:13–4:1).

Three murders will occur before David becomes king of all the people: Asahel's (chap. 2), Abner's (chap. 3) and Ishbosheth's (chap. 4). All of that blood would not have been shed if the leaders had only submitted to God's chosen king instead of seeking their own advantage. Joab and Asahel were related to David (1 Chron. 2:16), so there were both family and national considerations. Had everybody put the glory of God and the good of the nation first, tragedies would have been avoided.

2 SAMUEL 3

Trusting in the Lord, David went "from strength to strength" (Ps. 84:7). He was God's anointed and knew that God would fulfill His promise and make him king over all Israel. When you walk by faith, you can wait on Him.

Abner also grew in strength (v. 6), not the strength of the Lord but political power. He had more authority than the king, for he had made Ishbosheth king. Abner's use of power to please himself was his downfall.

David's way of life was reconciliation; he was a peacemaker. But Abner and Joab lived by retaliation: "All who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Matt. 26:52). Abner had murdered Asahel, and his sin had found him out. But Joab's deed was wicked, and David dissociated himself from it. Imagine Joab avenging his brother's blood at Hebron, a city of refuge!

David was strong, yet he was weak (v. 39)! When we are weak in ourselves, the Lord can be strong through us (2 Cor. 12:7–10). We cannot control circumstances and people, but we can control what we say and do.

2 SAMUEL 4

Now for murder number three, committed by two men who did not know David's heart. When they heard that Abner was dead, they concluded that Ishbosheth would not remain king very long, so they murdered the king. They thought the act would please David and perhaps win them key positions in David's kingdom.

Verse 8 reveals the captains' stupidity. Saul was *not* David's enemy. *The Lord* did not avenge David. David was *not* pleased at what they did. What terrible things people do in the name of the Lord, thinking to please Him! How many "religious" wars and church conflicts have broken God's heart and disgraced His name!

When you are tempted to retaliate, keep in mind that God's people do not "do evil that good may come" (Rom. 3:8). Rather, they "overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:21).

2 SAMUEL 5

When God's king ruled over His people, there was unity instead of division and civil war. All Israel submitted to God and to David, and there was peace among the brethren.

We should submit to Jesus Christ, the Son of David, for many reasons. He is God's Chosen One (v. 2), and we are "members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones" (Eph. 5:30). He is God's Anointed (the name *Christ* means "anointed one"), and He alone has the right to reign. He has proved Himself in battle and won the victory over our enemies.

As long as believers submit to someone other than the Lord Jesus Christ, division and dissension will exist among God's people. Unity comes not because we have a common enemy but because we obey a common King. (See 1 Cor. 1:10-31.)

2 SAMUEL 6

Fervor. David wanted to honor God by having the ark in the new capital of the land, Jerusalem (Matt. 6:33). The plan had all the marks of success: thirty thousand choice men assisted him, and the people were enthusiastic. David had lived among

the Philistines so long that he unconsciously adopted their methods (1 Sam. 6) and ignored the law of God (Num. 4:15; 10:21). Why did he forget to consult God for the guidance he needed?

Fear. If the ark had been on the shoulders of the Levites, God would not have judged Uzzah, and David would not have been afraid. God's throne does not need man's hand to keep it steady and safe.

Faith. David was not one to quit because of a mistake, so he did it again—God's way. David expressed his worship and praise publicly, without shame, and God accepted them. Acts 3:1–10 is another example of fervent praise to God.

Folly. Full of joy, David came home to bless his family, only to have Michal ridicule him. Not everybody gets the blessing, and some people resent it when others get blessed. She was unspiritual and unsympathetic, and as a result, she became unfruitful. Michal was David's first wife, and she no doubt resented the other wives in the home (Deut. 17:17).

When all else fails, take time to read God's instructions.

Criticism

Never be afraid of honest criticism. If it is correct, the critic has helped you. If it is incorrect, you can help the critic. Either way, somebody is helped. When criticism is cruel, as was Michal's, look beyond the critic and leave the matter with God (Ps. 37). Elbert Hubbard observed, "To escape criticism—do nothing, say nothing, be nothing."

2 SAMUEL 7

How would you respond if God said no to one of your greatest ambitions, something that you were sure would please Him? David wanted to build a house for the Lord (Ps. 132), but God would not permit him to do so. David was disappointed,

and his responses show us how to handle the disappointments of life.

He submitted to God's will. David humbly accepted God's plan and did not try to change God's mind. He realized that God knows best.

He listened to God's word. God would build a house (family) for David! The immediate reference is to Solomon, but ultimately the promise refers to Jesus Christ, the Son of David. If God says no to something, it is so that He may say yes to something better.

He gave himself to worship. David's words in verses 18-29 emphasize the greatness and the grace of God. Who was David that God should call him and bless him? Who was Israel that God should choose them? And who are we that God should save us and bless us?

It has well been said, "Disappointments are His appointments." David believed that. Do you? Have you learned that there can be blessing in *unanswered* prayer?

Forever!

Notice the "forevers" in 2 Samuel 7: a throne (v. 13), a kingdom (v. 16), a nation (v. 24), a promise (v. 25), and a blessing (v. 29).

2 SAMUEL 8

David's name is found twenty-one times in chapter 8. God magnified David's name because David did the will of God (v. 13). Exalt yourself and God will humble you, but humble yourself and God will exalt you (1 Pet. 5:5-6).

God gave David victory, and David used each victory to serve the Lord (v. 11). David knew that he would not build the temple, but he risked his life to gather the wealth Solomon would need to do the job. If God gives your dream to somebody else, help him or her fulfill it.

David recovered lost territory and gained new territory, a good example for us to follow in our spiritual walk and warfare.

2 SAMUEL 9

Kindness is the key theme (vv. 1, 3, 7) of this chapter. Kindness is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22) and an evidence of love (1 Cor. 13:4). David was practicing what is taught in Ephesians 4:32.

This event illustrates God's kindness to us in Christ (Eph. 2:7; Titus 3:4). As a part of the family of Saul, Mephibosheth had no claims on the kingdom; yet David treated him like one of his own sons. He did it for the sake of Jonathan (v. 7) in order to keep his covenant (1 Sam. 20:12–16). God has saved us for the sake of His Son, a part of the eternal covenant of redemption (Eph. 4:32; Heb. 13:20–21).

Mephibosheth did not need to fear (v. 7) because David would keep his word. The lame prince would have all his needs met and sit with the king every day. There was nothing to worry about! In the light of Ephesians 1:3 and 2:4–10, why should you worry? Henry Drummond wisely stated, "The greatest thing a man can do for his Heavenly Father is to be kind to some of His other children."

2 SAMUEL 10

David's kindness to Mephibosheth was accepted, but his gesture of kindness to Hanun was rejected and led to the death of nearly fifty thousand men. Hanun's counselors were suspicious of David and questioned his motives because they judged David on the basis of *what they would have done*.

The King's servants are sometimes treated badly (Matt. 10:16ff.), but they need not fret: their King has everything in control, and some things heal with time. God cares for His own.

Verse 12 is a good illustration of the biblical balance between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. The same God who ordains the end (victory in battle) also ordains the means to the end (courageous men who do their job well). Faith and works must always go together.

2 SAMUEL 11

How we wish that "the matter of Uriah the Hittite" (1 Kings 15:5) were not in the Bible, but it is here for our warning and

learning. Believers can thank God that *our* sins are not written down for everyone to read!

Disobedience. You start on the path to sin when you neglect duty. David was in more danger in Jerusalem than with his army on the battlefield. He laid aside his armor (Eph. 6:10ff.), allowed his eyes to wander, and lust took over (James 1:14–15).

Deception. Like our first parents, we try to cover our sins, but God will find us out (Gen. 3:7; Prov. 28:13). David the adulterer became a liar and a schemer, and then a murderer. Uriah was one of David's mighty men (2 Sam. 23:39). While David was sinning, Uriah and his fellow soldiers were risking their lives for him on the battlefield.

Displeasure. From the human point of view, the scheme worked, but God was not pleased. See what David wrote in Psalms 5:4 and 11:5, and note Proverbs 6:16–19 and 1 Thessalonians 4:1–8.

Before you yield to temptation . . . look back and recall God's goodness to you; look ahead and remember "the wages of sin"; look around and think of all the people who may be affected by what you do; look up and ask God for the strength to say no (1 Cor. 10:13).

2 SAMUEL 12

Chastening. For about a year, David hid his sins and suffered under the chastening hand of God (Ps. 32; Heb. 12:1–11). God gave David opportunity for repentance, but he refused to yield. Chastening proves God's love to us; our yielding proves our love to Him.

Conviction. How easy it is to condemn others! But beware: the sentence you pass on others will be passed on you (Matt. 7:1–5). David paid fourfold for his sins: the baby died, his daughter Tamar was raped, and his sons Absalom and Amnon were killed.

Confession. The Law said that both David and Bathsheba should die (Lev. 20:10). In His grace, God forgave their sins (Ps. 51); but in His government, He permitted them to reap what they had sown. First John 1:9 is a great promise, but it is not an excuse for sin. Remember, there are sad consequences of *forgiven* sin.

Comfort. God gave David another son and another crown. Saul lost his crown because he would not repent, but David always confessed his sin and rested on God's mercy (Rom. 5:20).

2 SAMUEL 13

David now begins to reap the harvest of sowing to the flesh, the painful consequences of *forgiven* sin (2 Sam. 12:10; Gal. 6:7-8). Of all the trials of life, the most difficult to bear are those that come from our own family because of our failures.

So possessed was he by lust that Amnon made arrangements to sin. He knew that he was breaking God's law by violating a virgin whom he could not wed (Deut. 22:28-29; Lev. 20:17). Lust was replaced by hatred, for both are born of violence, and hatred resulted in Tamar's being ostracized in Israel.

David's anger may have been restrained by his conscience, for he did nothing to punish Amnon. Absalom plotted, waited, and then avenged his sister by killing Amnon (James 1:15). David has now lost two sons to death and one to exile, and the situation will grow worse. The next time sin looks attractive to you, remember David's trials.

2 SAMUEL 14

Nathan had told a story to help David do a right thing, repent of his sins (2 Sam. 12:1-6). This woman told a story to encourage David to do a wrong thing, restore Absalom without first insisting on repentance.

Forgiveness that ignores justice is only a fiction. Even God does not restore a "banished one" (v. 13) without first paying the price to uphold His law. Forgiveness is not cheap; it is costly (Rom. 3:21-26). God demands that we repent and turn from sin. Jesus Christ had to die that we might be forgiven, for there is no other way.

God's forgiveness is complete; we can come into His presence and "see His face" (1 John 1:9-2:2). David restored Absalom's position, but he did not improve his character, so the young man returned to his sinful ways. The only thing

weighty about Absalom was his hair; the rest of him was chaff. His good looks camouflaged a bad heart.

2 SAMUEL 15

Enticement. Absalom personified everything that God hates (Prov. 6:16–19). Unfortunately, many in Israel were deceived by him and believed his flattery and lies. They should have remained loyal to the Lord and to David, but recall what the crowd did to the Son of David (Matt. 27:15–26; Acts 3:14).

Escape. A crisis helps to reveal who our loyal friends really are. David's servants were ready to obey (v. 15) and ready to die (v. 21). Ittai was a foreigner, yet he stayed with the king. The priests and David's counselor returned to the place of danger. David was a man of prayer, but he also used wise strategy. Ahithophel abandoned David and joined the rebellion. But he was Bathsheba's grandfather (2 Sam. 11:3; 23:34), so he took the opportunity for revenge.

Read the following psalms that many Bible students believe David wrote during the time of Absalom's rebellion: 3–4, 39, 41, 55, 61–63, and 143.

2 SAMUEL 16

In times of crisis, people respond in various ways. Expect to meet the following:

The liar. Ziba was an opportunist who took advantage of both David and Mephibosheth. In situations like this, heed Proverbs 18:13.

The accuser. Shimei was related to Saul and blamed David for the destruction of Saul's family and kingdom. David patiently "took it" and left the matter with the Lord. There are times when silence and submission are your best responses (1 Pet. 2:18–25).

The avenger. Abishai was usually quick to declare war (1 Sam. 26:1–11), but David took the better approach. (See Luke 22:47–53.)

The traitor. Ahithophel had been David's esteemed counselor, but he turned traitor and sided with Absalom. He was the "Judas" in the camp (Ps. 55:12–14). David prayed about the

problem (2 Sam. 15:31) and trusted God to work (Phil. 4:6–9), and He did.

2 SAMUEL 17

Hushai was a master of metaphors, and God used his skillful way with words to defeat Absalom. He compared David to an angry bear (v. 8) and a fierce lion (v. 10). Then he appealed to Absalom's pride by telling him to lead a large army ("like the sand" [v. 11]) and defeat David himself, coming upon David's men "as the dew falls" (v. 12). Absalom pictured himself as the conquering general, and pride did the rest (Prov. 16:18).

David owed his life to the brave men who stayed in Jerusalem and kept the king informed of Absalom's plans, and also to an anonymous woman who protected the messengers. The people who helped him at Mahanaim were a gift of God. Jacob saw angels at Mahanaim (Gen. 32:1–2), but David's "angels" were loving people who cared for him. Behind all great leaders are devoted people whom God rewards but whose names we too soon forget.

Ahithophel saw that Absalom would lose the battle, and like Judas, he committed suicide (Matt. 27:1–5). He could counsel others, but he did not wisely counsel himself.

2 SAMUEL 18

Two armies. There can be no neutrality when it comes to supporting and defending God's kingdom (Josh. 24:14–15; Matt. 12:30). We can understand a father's concern for his son, but there can be no gentleness when it comes to dealing with sin. David wanted love without justice, but with Joab it was justice without love. Only on the cross of Christ are love and justice both satisfied. God "did not spare His own Son" (Rom. 8:32).

Two monuments. Both Saul (1 Sam. 15:12) and Absalom set up monuments to their memory, but what do we remember about them? Joab and his men built the true monument: a heap of stones over the dead body of a proud rebel. The life you live is the monument you build, and ultimately the truth will come out.

Two messages. Ahimaaz had ambition and ability, but he lacked the maturity needed to minister to the king. Before you start to run, be sure you are the right person to deliver the message (Prov. 25:13).

2 SAMUEL 19

Making wounds (1–8). Joab had to hurt David to help him: “Faithful are the wounds of a friend” (Prov. 27:6). David’s sorrow over his dead son almost cost him the kingdom. It is right to mourn, but not to the point that we lose touch with reality.

Healing wounds (9–15). It was time for the whole nation to affirm loyalty to God’s chosen king, and David declared an amnesty except in certain cases. The tribes brought him back; he forgave Shimei and Mephibosheth; he rewarded Barzillai.

Opening wounds (40–43). Intertribal jealousy appeared again (Judg. 8:1; 12:1), and David faced a new rebellion (Prov. 13:10). Instead of using the soft answer (Prov. 15:1), the men of Judah held to their rights and made the situation worse. Romans 12:10 and Philipians 2:1–4 give the counsel we need.

2 SAMUEL 20

Events create opportunities, and people use opportunities in different ways.

Sheba saw the tribal conflict as an opportunity for promoting himself. Because he was a Benjamite, he hoped to get broad support from Saul’s friends and David’s enemies, and he almost succeeded. Once again, the people deserted God’s chosen king for an opportunist.

Amasa was chosen to lead David’s army to victory (2 Sam. 19:13), but he delayed and lost his opportunity for greatness. However, Joab seized the opportunity, removed his replacement, won the battle and got his job back. Joab had murdered Abner, Absalom, and Amasa; yet David apparently did nothing to discipline him. Perhaps Joab knew too much about David (2 Sam. 11:6ff.).

The wise woman saw an opportunity to end the war and prevent many innocent people from being killed. Blessed are the peacemakers!

Opportunities will come your way today. How will you use them?

2 SAMUEL 21

Promises are not to be made carelessly or broken with impunity.

God kept His promise. If the nation obeyed God's law, He promised to bless them with rain and plenty, but if they disobeyed, He would discipline them. God often sent famines to discipline His people (Deut. 28:23-24).

Saul broke a promise. Israel's covenant with Gibeon (Josh. 9) had been honored for centuries, and then Saul violated it. Old sins can create new problems long after the sinners are dead.

David kept a promise. The law demanded fair and equal punishment for each crime (Exod. 21:23-25). Saul had killed innocent people, so his family had to pay the price to purge the innocent blood from the land (Deut. 19:11-13). David kept his promise to Mephibosheth (2 Sam. 9:7) and to Jonathan (1 Sam. 20:15-16) by sparing Mephibosheth's life. David also saw to it that the dead in Saul's family had decent burial.

David made a promise. Giants have a way of multiplying, and David discovered that he was not the giant killer he had been in his youth. There comes a time when we must give up some lesser things to protect the things that are more important. It was difficult for David to lay aside his armor and weapons, but it was a wise thing to do.

2 SAMUEL 22

This psalm of victory is almost identical to Psalm 18. Note that David did not list Saul as one of his enemies (v. 1). What grace!

David did not take credit for any of his victories; he gave the glory to God. Nor was he ashamed to admit that he had cried out to God for deliverance and strength. His words should encourage us when we experience times of trial and testing.

Verses 21-24 are not a declaration of sinless perfection, for David was a sinner like any other man. They describe David's

integrity of heart (Ps. 78:70-72). David obeyed the Word of God and trusted God to keep His promise and put him on the throne of Israel.

As he looked back on those years of danger and difficulty, David did not see the hardness of life; he saw the gentleness of God (v. 36). David affirmed that the yoke was easy and the burden was light (Matt. 11:28-30). Your life today may seem hard, but keep trusting and obeying. One of these days, God will give you your own victory song, and you will experience greatness from the gentle hand of God.

2 SAMUEL 23

Leaders (1-7). Earlier in his reign, David wrote a long psalm about victory (2 Sam. 22), but when he closed his life, he wrote a beautiful brief song about leadership. Leaders must be called of God and empowered by Him (v. 1). They must be taught the Word of God by the Spirit of God (v. 2). They must be men and women of character who fear God (vv. 3-4). They are ruling for God, not for self.

A Cup of Water

David's hands accomplished many things as he held a sword, a spear and a harp. The finest thing he ever did was with a cup of water, for in making it a drink offering to the Lord, he revealed true character. "We can do no great things," said Mother Teresa, "only small things with great love."

Two metaphors describe leadership that is spiritual: the dawning of a new day, and the springing up of grass after the rain (v. 4). Saul brought darkness to the land, but David brought light. Saul caused storms, but David brought calm after the storm and caused the storms to produce fruit. That is leadership!

Followers (8–39). True leaders are not afraid to surround themselves with people of ability and then give them opportunities for greatness. Those men were so close to David that his whispered desires became their marching orders (vv. 15–17). David loved them so much that he would not selfishly enjoy what had cost them dearly. What an example those men are to us who follow Jesus Christ!

2 SAMUEL 24

A stubborn heart (1–9). There are sins of the spirit as well as sins of the flesh (2 Cor. 7:1). In his pride, David numbered the people, but he did not connect the census with the redemption money (Exod. 30:11–16) and seek to honor God. The Lord gave David nine months to change his mind, just long enough for the “pregnancy of sin” to give birth to death (James 1:13–15).

A smitten heart (10–14). David’s sin was a sin of the will, so God asked him to make some decisions. He confessed his sin (“I have sinned *greatly*”) and was forgiven, but he still had to suffer the consequences of sin.

A suffering heart (15–17). David had a shepherd’s heart and longed to deliver his people. It is more difficult to watch those you love suffer than to endure it yourself.

A sacrificing heart (18–25). David did not take the easy way out. His repentance was sincere, and he paid the full price to prove it. Who pays for your sacrifices? Amazing grace! Solomon built the temple on the property that David purchased for his altar. Solomon was the son of Bathsheba. What amazing grace that God could take David’s two great sins and build a temple out of them! (See Rom. 5:20.)

1 and 2 KINGS

As the name indicates, these books record the history of the Jewish kings, from Solomon to Zedekiah. When the account begins, the nation is one (1 Kings 1–11). After Solomon's death, it divided (1 Kings 12–22); then both kingdoms went into captivity (2 Kings). The northern tribes were taken by Assyria (2 Kings 1–17), and the southern kingdom was taken by Babylon (2 Kings 18–25).

Israel was a nation greatly blessed by God, and yet it ended in disgrace and defeat. The cause was sin. Solomon worshiped the idols of the foreign nations, and the nation followed him. It took only one generation for the nation to decay and divide, as the false prophets and the worldly priests led the people astray. The leaders and the people would not listen to God's prophets and return to the true worship of Jehovah, so there was nothing left for God to do but discipline His people as He had warned (Deut. 28).

1 KINGS

1 KINGS 1

Some people are gullible and unwilling to learn from the past. Like Absalom, Adonijah was handsome, popular, and proud. His "I will be king!" sounds like another boast that ended in judgment (Isa. 14:12-15). Foolishly, Joab and Abiathar joined Adonijah and opposed God's man, Solomon, and they paid for it. They should have paid more attention to this pronouncement: "You shall not follow a crowd to do evil" (Exod. 23:2).

Sometimes leaders must be led, and Nathan and Bathsheba did it wisely. David had given up the sword (2 Sam. 21:15-17), and now he must give up the scepter. Wise is the leader who knows when to step aside. Solomon was God's choice for the throne (2 Sam. 12:24-25).

Adonijah fled to the altar for safety, not for sanctity. Religion was something he used only for personal profit, but some insincere people today do the same thing.

1 KINGS 2

The king died. Death is an appointment we all must keep (Heb. 9:27), unless the Lord comes to take us home (1 Cor. 15:51ff.). Before he died, David gave Solomon wise counsel about the men who were a threat to the throne. It is good to know where the enemy is hiding. David had served his generation well (Acts 13:36).

The usurper died. Adonijah still wanted the throne and almost tricked Bathsheba into helping him. Since Abishag was one of David's concubines, claiming her would be the same as

claiming the throne. Adonijah had planned a wedding, but he ended up at a funeral.

The murderer died. Abiathar and Joab were both traitors, but Abiathar was spared because he was a priest. However, the exile removed the descendants of Eli from office as had been predicted years before (1 Sam. 2:30–35). Joab paid for murdering three men and also for his treachery to David. Benaiiah was a priest (1 Chron. 27:5), but he was one of David's mighty men and Joab's successor as head of the army.

The accuser died. (See 2 Sam. 16:5–14; 19:18–23.) Had Shimei obeyed orders, he would have lived, but he defied the king and lost his life.

How true is the declaration: "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne" (Ps. 97:2).

1 KINGS 3

Politics. The Jews were not forbidden to marry Egyptians, but Solomon's marriage to Pharaoh's daughter was the first step toward his breaking the law of God and bringing tragic consequences to himself and the people (1 Kings 11:1–8; see also Deut. 7:1–4). It was purely a political move designed to bring peace to the land, and it worked.

Prayer. How would you answer God's question: "What shall I give you?" Your answer reveals what you believe about yourself and the work God has called you to do. Solomon knew that he needed wisdom more than anything else, and God gave him that and much more (Matt. 6:33; Eph. 3:20–21). Prayer is not simply getting things from God. It is getting so that we might be able to give to others. Solomon's concern was ability to serve his people well.

Perception. Prostitutes had access to the king (Matt. 9:10–11)! The wisdom God gives is practical and helps us in the decisions of life (Prov. 1:1–7; James 1:5).

1 KINGS 4

Samuel's dire prediction came true (1 Sam. 8:10–18), for Solomon did a great deal of "taking." He divided the nation into twelve districts, each with a governor, and required each dis-

strict to supply provisions for the royal household once a year. When you read the daily menu, you can see how difficult meeting those requirements must have been for the people (1 Kings 12:4).

Verse 20 describes a prosperous people but not a spiritual people. Peace and prosperity do not always breed nobility of character, and rejoicing without responsibility is the way to ruin. As for Solomon's horses, read Deuteronomy 17:17.

Jesus Christ is "greater than Solomon" (Matt. 12:42) in wisdom (Col. 2:3), wealth (Col. 1:19; 2:9), and the bounty He shares with His people (Eph. 3:20-21). He does not promise you a life of "eat, drink, and be merry" (v. 20), but He does promise to meet all your needs (Phil. 4:19) and never forsake you (Matt. 28:19-20; Heb. 13:5). One day you shall share His heavenly home and live with Him forever (John 14:1-6)!

1 KINGS 5—7

Cooperation. God gave David the design for the temple (1 Chron. 28:11-19), and David and the people provided most of the materials (1 Chron. 29). A gentile king, Hiram, supplied the timber, and a Canaanite work force (1 Kings 9:20-22) assisted the Jewish workers. It was a cooperative effort supervised by King Solomon. God is building His "holy temple" today (Eph. 2:19-22), and He uses the service of all kinds of people. Are you helping to build His church?

Pillars

The two pillars were called Jachin ("He will establish") and Boaz ("In Him is strength").

God provides stability and strength for His people because they worship Him. God's house was costly and beautiful, but it also needed stability and strength (Ps. 96:6).

Construction. They built with gold, silver, and costly stones (1 Chron. 28:14–29:9), the same materials God wants in His church (1 Cor. 3:10–23; see also Prov. 2:1–9; 3:13–15; 8:10–11). Every detail was spelled out, and Solomon saw to it that the design was followed perfectly.

Concern. Wealth beyond measure went into the building of the temple, but the important thing was *obedience to the Lord* (1 Kings 6:11–13). God is not impressed with our buildings, for He provides everything we put into them (Isa. 66:1–2). He wants our loving obedience, and then He can make the buildings a blessing.

1 KINGS 8

Solomon's temple was a place of glory (vv. 1–12). However, despite its extraordinary beauty, it was just another building until God moved in and consecrated it (Exod. 40:34–38). So it is with our lives (1 Cor. 6:19–20; Eph. 5:18) and our assemblies (1 Cor. 14:23–25). The presence of God is the important thing. A. W. Tozer aptly stated, "If God were to take the Holy Spirit out of this world, much of what the church is doing would go right on, *and nobody would know the difference.*"

The temple was a place of testimony (vv. 14–21, 56), bearing witness that God keeps His word. It was to be a place of prayer (vv. 22–53). Solomon was especially concerned that God hear the prayers of His own people as well as those of the stranger and foreigner. In later years, the religious leaders would turn the house of prayer into a den of thieves (Matt. 21:12–13).

Who Is Justified?

Solomon prayed that God would condemn the wicked and justify the righteous (1 Kings 8:32). But through Jesus Christ, God justifies (declares righteous) the wicked (Rom. 4:5), and He does it on the basis of grace, not works. God cannot justify the righteous because there are none (Rom. 3:10).

It was a place of blessing (vv. 54–61) and sacrifice (vv. 62–66). The two go together: we give our best to the Lord, and then we share our best with others. It is unfortunate that Solomon failed in the very thing he exhorted his people to remember—loyalty of heart (v. 61).

Finally, the temple was a place of witness to the world (vv. 41–43, 60), for Solomon had a “missionary vision” for the gentile nations. What an opportunity Israel had to win the lost people around them!

The Heart of the Matter

Solomon's emphasis was on the heart: each one knows his own heart (1 Kings 8:38); God knows the heart (v. 39); we return to God with all our hearts (v. 48); God must incline our hearts to obedience (v. 58); God wants each of us to have a loyal heart (v. 61).

1 KINGS 9

Assurance. We dedicate, but only God can consecrate (sanctify) what we give Him. It is important to hear from God when a task has been completed, lest there be a letdown that can lead to discouragement (1 Kings 19). The phrases “My name . . . My eyes . . . My heart” (v. 3) indicate God’s nearness to His people. He is identified with us; He watches over us; He loves us.

Admonition. Because He loves us, God warns us not to disobey Him. Solomon did not heed this warning, and God kept His promise and sent discipline. God would rather destroy His holy temple than permit His people to pollute it with their sin.

Agreement. Solomon was a successful maker of treaties with the gentiles, and that ability helped to keep Israel out of war. However, there was a price to pay and a constant danger to avoid. Ultimately, Solomon was controlled by the gods of those nations (1 Kings 11).

Achievement. But everything looked grand as Solomon

built buildings, walls, and ships and increased the wealth of the nation. They needed the warning of Revelation 3:17-18. The spiritual life of the nation was gradually decaying behind the veneer of prosperity.

1 KINGS 10

Our fame and God's name must go together (v. 1). If God magnifies your name (Josh. 3:7; 6:27), be sure He gets the glory (Ps. 135:13). Fame is a heavy burden to bear, and only God can help us do it wisely.

The queen traveled twelve hundred miles to see and hear Solomon. Her reasons were both personal and political, for she wanted to enter into trade agreements with the king. The people of Jesus' day rejected a "greater than Solomon" who was there among them (Matt. 12:42), and they were judged for it.

Do we take our blessings for granted? In spite of the queen's enthusiasm, perhaps even Solomon's servants got accustomed to hearing his wise words and beholding his great wealth (v. 8). Israel grew accustomed to the miracle of the manna (Num. 11), and the church at Ephesus grew accustomed to Christ's love (Rev. 2:1-7).

Chariots and horses (vv. 26-29) were another indication of decay (Deut. 17:17). And don't forget what Jesus said about all of Solomon's glory (Matt. 6:29).

1 KINGS 11

Apostasy. Solomon had wisdom for everybody else but would not apply it to himself (Rom. 2:21-24). The man who wrote Proverbs 4:23 did not obey it (v. 4; 1 Kings 8:61). The king was required to write a personal copy of Deuteronomy and study it (Deut. 17:18-20), so surely Solomon knew Deuteronomy 7:1-11; 17:17. It is one thing to know the Word but quite another thing to do it (James 1:22-25).

Anger. God's blessings are given by grace, but they are enjoyed by obedience. Solomon was disobedient, and yet surely he knew that the covenant included warnings about disobedience (2 Sam. 7:14; 1 Kings 3:14; 9:4-9).

Adversaries. God had a special love for Solomon (2 Sam.

12:24–25); therefore, He had to chasten him (Prov. 3:11–12). Haddad, Rezon, and Jeroboam all created problems for the king as the flimsy tissue of Israel's "peace" began to fall apart. Solomon even planned to murder his rival, Jeroboam! God was kind to Solomon only for the sake of David (v. 32), but how long can a nation (or a church or a family) live on the spiritual dividends of their ancestors' sacrifice and obedience?

1 KINGS 12

Rehoboam did not seek God's wisdom, as had his father before him (1 Kings 3). Instead, he turned to men for guidance and even then did not heed the right advice. Like some people who seek counsel today, he wanted somebody to tell him to do what he already decided to do. The new king grew up in luxury. What did he know about the burdens of the common people?

We lead by serving (Matt. 20:20–28), and a true leader seeks to lighten the loads people carry. (Compare Matt. 11:28–30 and 23:4.) The king used the people to build his authority instead of using his authority to build the people. The result was a divided nation as Ahijah predicted (1 Kings 11:29ff.). As much as we love unity, we must accept the fact that some divisions are of God.

Afraid that his people would return to Jerusalem to worship, Jeroboam established a "religion of convenience" (v. 28) and made it easy for the nation to sin. Abandoning the true worship of Jehovah, he repeated the sin of Aaron (Exod. 32). Patterned after the Mosaic system, his religion was popular, but it did not have God's approval (Hos. 13:2).

1 KINGS 13

Courage. The anonymous prophet received his message from God and delivered it to the king. It was fulfilled nearly three hundred years later by King Josiah (2 Kings 23:15–20). The prophet did not fear the king's threats or succumb to the king's bribes, both of which would have invalidated his ministry.

Compromise. Had the prophet continued to obey God's directions, he would not have been killed, but gradually he got

out of the will of God. Instead of hurrying home, he sat down (v. 14). Instead of obeying his original commission from God, he believed the lies of the old prophet. The prophet ended up eating and drinking with an enemy who pretended to be a friend.

Unless they can back it up from the Word, beware when others know God's will for your life. The sign found on some traffic lights preaches a good sermon: OBEY YOUR OWN SIGNAL.

1 KINGS 14

Disguise. Why did the king not consult one of the false gods he worshiped? And why not go to the Lord's prophet *personally* and *openly*? Because Jeroboam was a coward and did not want to weaken his "religious establishment." He did not dare identify himself publicly with the true worship of Jehovah, even though he knew that his own religious leaders could not help him.

Death. Abijah had good news about the son but bad news about everybody else in the royal family. God saw true devotion in the son and would not permit him to grow up in such an evil home. The boy was the only male to have a decent burial and be mourned. See verse 18 and 1 Kings 15:25-30 for the fulfillment.

Decay. Under King Rehoboam, Solomon's great kingdom lost both quantity (the tribes) and quality (the treasures). The costly golden shields (1 Kings 10:16-17) were replaced by bronze shields, but the guards and the king went through the same ceremony. What a picture of some lives and ministries today: everything looks the same, but the value has vanished. All we do is keep up appearances (Matt. 23).

1 KINGS 15

A flickering lamp. God blessed Judah for David's sake, just as He blesses us for the sake of His beloved Son (Eph. 1:3) and because of the faithfulness of those who have gone before us. "Except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite"—and what a costly exception that was! Even a man who sinned greatly can

be restored and become a blessing to others. But the lamp of truth was flickering, and Judah's sins would one day be judged.

An inconsistent ruler. Asa had a wonderful beginning to his reign but a disappointing ending. He was courageous enough to cleanse the temple of religious prostitutes and purge the land of idols, and he even dethroned his own grandmother. But instead of trusting the Lord for victory, he robbed the temple and bribed a pagan king to assist him in a war.

A certain judgment. God had promised that the house of Jeroboam would be destroyed, and Baasha was the instrument of that judgment. But Baasha repeated the sins of Jeroboam! Did he think that *he* would escape punishment? F. von Logau commented, "Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small."

1 KINGS 16

Whenever the kings or priests led the people into sin, God sent faithful prophets to warn them and to call them back to the true worship of Jehovah. Jehu was such a prophet; he was not afraid to give God's message of judgment to evil King Baasha. Are we today willing to take our stand against evil, or do we just drift with the crowd?

Baasha had imitated Jeroboam's sins, so he would suffer Jeroboam's judgment (1 Kings 14:7-11). God used Zimri to fulfill His word against Baasha. If we do not heed what God says, we must suffer His judgment.

Zimri's reign was brief. Rather than fall into the hands of Omri and his faction, Zimri committed suicide. Omri, too, chose to disobey God and "did worse than all who were before him" (v. 25). And one of the worst things he did was to leave his son Ahab to reign over Israel.

Ahab married a heathen princess, worshiped a heathen god, and provoked the Lord greatly. He made Baal worship a popular religion in Israel. Baal was the Canaanite storm god, and his worship was attractive to a nation that depended so much on rain. Besides, the rituals involved temple prostitutes, and that appealed to the baser appetites of the people.

1 KINGS 17

Samuel grew up being recognized as God's prophet (1 Sam. 3:19-21), but Elijah *suddenly* appeared before Ahab declaring God's message. The drought, for which he had prayed (James 5:17), was Elijah's declaration of war against Ahab, Jezebel, and the storm god Baal. If the king and the people had humbled themselves before the Lord, He would have sent rain to the land (Deut. 11:13-17; 2 Chron. 7:12-15), but most of the nation trusted Baal, not Jehovah.

The drought had three more years to go (1 Kings 18:1; Luke 4:25), and God took care of His faithful servant (Ps. 37:3-6). During that time of "retirement," God led him, fed him, and enabled him to help others, including a *gentile* widow (Luke 4:25-26). When we walk by faith, God supplies our needs and opens doors of opportunity for us.

Be sure to trust the Provider and not the provision. Brooks dry up, but God never fails.

1 KINGS 18

Searching for water. Ahab's capital city suffered severely, but the godless rulers did not repent. It takes more than suffering to break a proud heart; it takes hearing and yielding to the word of God. But Ahab and Jezebel tried to silence God's word by killing God's prophets. They showed more concern for their animals than for their people. When a nation's leaders have their priorities confused, the nation will suffer greatly.

Searching for Elijah. Ahab wanted to kill Elijah (v. 10), but God protected His servant. To Ahab, Elijah was an enemy (1 Kings 21:20), but Ahab was his own worst enemy. We commend Obadiah for protecting the prophets, but that was not the final solution. Israel had to make a decision between Baal and Jehovah (Josh. 24:14-21).

Searching for God. Baal was the storm god, so he should have been able to send rain, but he failed. Elijah rebuked the people (v. 21), repaired the altar (v. 30), and relied on the Lord (vv. 36-37), and God revealed Himself by sending fire (v. 38). In response to Elijah's prayer, God sent rain. Elijah was the man of the hour: he honored God, and God honored him.

Some may ask, "Where is the LORD God of Elijah?"

(2 Kings 2:14). Perhaps the better question is, *Where are the Elijahs?*

1 KINGS 19

The “Elijah complex” can rob you of power and joy, so beware! Elijah went from victory to defeat because he started walking by sight and not by faith (v. 3). He believed the queen’s words but not God’s word, and he forgot how God had cared for him for three and a half years. Fear replaced faith, and he ran for his life.

He became concerned about saving himself rather than giving himself (Mark 8:34–38; John 12:23–28). Note the sequence: “your life” (v. 2), “his life” (v. 3), “my life” (v. 4). If he had said, “Take my life,” as an act of surrender to God, the Lord would have worked in power; but his “Take my life” was a confession of pride and defeat. Beware when you think you are the only faithful one left!

They Wanted to Die!

Sometimes we feel so depressed about our work and ourselves that we wish God would call us home. Of course, had Elijah really wanted to die, Jezebel would have gladly accommodated him. But Elijah was not the only one to feel that way. Moses wanted to die (Num. 11:15), and so did Job (Job 3:20–21), Jeremiah (Jer. 8:3), and Jonah (Jon. 4:3). Of course, this is not the answer to despair because it is selfish and does not glorify God. The real answer is to die to self and trust God to work things out. “The future is your friend when Jesus is your Lord.”

God taught Elijah that He does not always work in the dramatic big events, such as the contest on Mount Carmel, but that He works by means of a “still small voice,” ministries that are neither big nor loud. Elijah was not forsaken, for God was with him. He was not alone, for seven thousand people had not bowed to Baal. His work would go on, for God had a young man ready to take his place.

We need to obey these words: “Do not be afraid; only believe” (Mark 5:36).

1 KINGS 20

Victory. In His grace, God gave wicked King Ahab two victories over the enemy. The first victory was to teach Ahab that the Lord was the true God (v. 13), and the second was to show the enemy that Jehovah was not weak and limited like the heathen idols (v. 28). We must never think that we receive blessings because we deserve them.

Compromise. Instead of claiming complete victory and destroying Ben-Hadad (v. 42), Ahab entered into a treaty with him! King Saul made the same mistake with the king of the Amalekites (1 Sam. 15:8–9), and both kings lost their kingdoms because of their disobedience. When you think the battle is over, you may face your greatest danger and experience your greatest defeat.

Defeat. The Lord had given the king ample evidence that He was God, but Ahab persisted in hardening his heart. Too spiritually blind to know who the prophet was or what he was talking about, Ahab pronounced his own death sentence (v. 40). His pouting did not change anything (Prov. 19:3), but he refused to turn to the Lord.

1 KINGS 21

Covetousness. Ahab asked Naboth to break the law, but Naboth refused (Num. 36:7). The king thought that every man had his price, but Naboth was not for sale. “You shall not covet” is the last of the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:17), but in breaking it, Ahab broke several of the other nine. Ahab and Jezebel put things ahead of God; they lied, murdered, and stole a man’s property; and they tried to cover it up. How

many commandments do we have to break to be guilty before God?

Conspiracy. Evil leaders could never succeed were it not for weak people who obey their orders. Jezebel did not fear God's name or believe in fasting, but she knew how to use both to get what she wanted. An innocent man died, but God saw it happen. Elijah found Ahab, Ahab's sin found Ahab (Num. 32:23), and the word of judgment was pronounced.

Clemency. Ahab humbled himself before God, not because he felt the burden of his sins but because he faced the terror of death. God delayed the execution of the sentence, but it came just the same. Ahab had sold himself to do evil, and his master—sin—finally paid the wages (Rom. 6:23).

1 KINGS 22

Fight your own battles. Jehoshaphat had no reason to meddle in Ahab's wars. He made the mistake of marrying Ahab's daughter (2 Chron. 18:1; 2 Cor. 6:14–18), so there were family obligations to fulfill.

Deliver your own message. False prophets usually agree in their messages of success and glory. The messenger tried to get Micaiah to imitate them, but he gave the true message of the Lord. It was not easy to be a prophet in Israel in that day, but Micaiah was faithful.

Know your own enemy. Ahab cleverly tried to make Jehoshaphat a decoy and get him killed (Luke 16:8), but God overruled and Ahab was slain instead. The prophecy of 1 Kings 21:19 was fulfilled (v. 38). Paul may have had verse 31 in mind when he wrote Ephesians 6:12ff. Our real enemy is the god of this age and the prince of darkness, so let's not waste time and ammunition on lesser foes.

Learn from your own mistakes. When the new king of Israel, Jehoshaphat's brother-in-law, asked for a new alliance, Jehoshaphat refused. He had learned his lesson the hard way, but at least he had learned it and profited from his mistakes. He was a great and godly man, and we must not allow one event to discredit his service for the Lord.

2 KINGS

This book records the collapse and captivity of the kingdom of Israel (chaps. 1–17) and the kingdom of Judah (chaps. 18–25). Spiritual decay led to political and social deterioration. In spite of the ministries of the prophets and the frequent chastenings God sent, Israel and Judah rebelled against the Lord and had to be judged. This is a warning to individuals (Prov. 29:1) and nations (Prov. 14:34) to listen to God’s Word and obey it.

2 KINGS 1

“What kind of man was it?” (v. 7) is a key question. The messengers described Elijah’s physical appearance, but they left out the most important thing. Elijah was “a man with a nature like ours” (James 5:17), but he was also a “man of God” (vv. 9–13). The physical description in verse 8 is incidental, yet that is what most people emphasize in their lives.

He was guided by the Lord. Elijah knew what was happening because he listened to God’s voice (Ps. 25:4–5, 14). We today do not hear an audible voice, but we have His Spirit within us and His Word before us.

He glorified the Lord. The very idea of the king going to a false god for help! Elijah wanted Ahaziah to know that Jehovah alone was the true God and that the king had better bow humbly before the Lord.

He trusted the Lord to care for him. Elijah was one man against fifty-one soldiers, but the Lord protected him. Had the soldiers completely forgotten the fire that came down on Mount Carmel? The third captain humbled himself, and God spared him and his company.

He did the Lord’s will. He delivered the message to the king as he was commanded to do.

Can God's people today be men and women of God? Certainly! Ponder 1 Timothy 6:10-12 and 2 Timothy 3:14-17.

The Man of God

The title "man of God" was given first to Moses (Deut. 33:1), then to Samuel (1 Sam. 9:6-7), Elijah (1 Kings 1:9-13), Elisha (2 Kings 4:9), David (2 Chron. 8:14), and Timothy (1 Tim. 6:11). You need not be a prophet to be a godly person, nor do you display your godliness by calling down fire from heaven (Luke 9:51-56). God wants us to use "coals of fire" and turn enemies into friends (Rom. 12:14-21).

2 KINGS 2

Companions. Elisha's ministry began with Elijah saying, "Go back!" (1 Kings 19:20). Now Elijah is saying, "Stay here!" Elisha did not go back but faithfully served Elijah about ten years. And Elisha did not linger at Bethel or Jericho but walked with Elijah to the very end. Think of what Elisha would have missed had he tarried!

Spectators. The students had knowledge without experience. They were just spectators, yet they tried to tell the prophet what was going on! Elisha was not a spectator; he was right in the middle of what God was doing. What good is our knowledge of spiritual things if it does not make a difference in our lives?

Doers. Elisha did not build a monument to Elijah. Instead, he trusted Elijah's God and did miracles. We cannot live *in* the past, *on* the past, or *for* the past. We must accept the heritage of the past and trust the living God for power today. There were problems to solve and needs to meet, and Elisha trusted God to help him. God's servants may leave us, but God's Spirit goes on working.

Mockers. They were not little children; the youths were old enough to know better. They mocked Elijah's going to heaven ("Go up!") and Elisha's personal appearance, and God rightly judged them for it. Today, God is patient with the mockers (2 Pet. 3), but one day, His judgment will fall on them.

2 KINGS 3

King Jehoshaphat was wrong to ally himself with the king of Israel (1 Kings 22), but Elisha did not withdraw from him because of that. The presence of the king of Judah was the only thing that motivated Elisha to help the kings in their plight. God still had a lamp in Judah for the sake of David.

The lack of water reminded all three kings that God was in control and their combined power meant nothing without Him. Samson had a similar experience (Judg. 15:18-20). The same water that meant salvation to the three armies brought defeat to overconfident Moab. (See Exod. 10:21-23; 2 Cor. 2:14-16.)

Hoping to get some good out of the war, the king of Moab attacked Edom alone, but he failed to conquer. In desperation, he even sacrificed the crown prince. The deed was so repulsive to Judah and Moab that they left the field in great anger against Israel for ever getting them involved. When you join forces with those who do not love God, you never know what will happen to embarrass or offend you or to disgrace the Lord's name.

2 KINGS 4

Elisha ministered to individuals and accepted the hospitality of friends. He was like Jesus Christ in that respect, while Elijah was more like John the Baptist: alone, rugged, a preacher to the nation. Although God equips different people to work in different ways, He is Lord of all (1 Cor. 12:1-11). It is too bad people do not recognize this fact and receive the ministry no matter who the minister is (Luke 7:31-35; 1 Cor. 1:10-17).

A husband died, yet God met the needs of the family (vv. 1-7). A son died, yet God raised him and restored the family (vv. 8-37). A group of prophets almost died because of poi-

soned stew, yet God removed the danger (vv. 38–41). A group of believers would have died from starvation, but God multiplied the bread and sustained them (vv. 42–44). All of these miracles remind you to *give God what you have and let Him do what He wills*.

Gehazi is declining spiritually, but the consequences will not appear until later. He was unkind to the Shunammite woman (v. 27; see also Matt. 15:23; Mark 10:13; Luke 9:49), and he had no power to help her. He went through the motions, but no life came. You can fellowship day after day with people of power, like the prophet Elisha, and still backslide. Beware!

Three Important Questions

What are your answers to the three questions the prophet asked the Shunammite woman? "Is it well with you? Is it well with your husband [or wife]? Is it well with the child?" (2 Kings 4:26).

2 KINGS 5

Servants. Servants played a major role in this miracle. The young Jewish girl gave a faithful witness for the Lord, and God used her testimony to get Naaman to visit Elisha. Naaman's servants encouraged him to obey the prophet, and his obedience led to his healing and his faith in Jehovah. No matter who or where you are, God can use your service. (See John 15:15.)

Suppositions. The king of Syria thought the king of Israel could perform the miracle, and the false assumption almost led to a war. Naaman supposed that Elisha would use some religious ritual to remove the leprosy, and the supposition almost led to his going home still a leper. Gehazi supposed that he could get away with sin, but God judged him.

Selfishness. Naaman was healed completely by God's grace, but Gehazi robbed God of glory by asking Naaman for gifts. The Syrians would think that they had to pay God to get His help. Gehazi lied to Naaman, to Elisha, and to himself,

but he could not lie to God. Gehazi became poor by getting rich.

They Became Lepers

In the Bible, leprosy is used as a picture of sin (Lev. 13). Gehazi became a leper because of covetousness and deception. Miriam became a leper because of criticism and envy (Num. 12). King Uzziah became a leper because of pride (2 Chron. 26:16-23). If God did this to people today, would you be a leper? The hidden sins of the spirit are dangerous (2 Cor. 7:1)!

2 KINGS 6

Doing the impossible (1-7). All that we have is "borrowed," loaned to us by the Lord to get His work done (John 3:27). You can lose your cutting edge even while serving the Lord. But be honest about it, stop trying to chop without an ax head, and ask the Lord for help in recovering it. He alone can do the impossible if you trust Him.

Knowing the unknowable (8-12). Because Elisha knew what the enemy would do, Israel had the opportunity to escape surprise attacks. If you study God's Word, you can know the strategy of Satan and be able to defeat him.

Seeing the invisible (13-17). Many times we are afraid of the enemy because we walk by sight and not by faith. If God and His hosts are for us, who can be against us?

Accomplishing the unthinkable (18-23). Knowing that Elisha was his real enemy, the king of Syria tried to capture the prophet. *But Elisha captured them*, and he did it with prayer and kindness (Rom. 12:19-21; 2 Cor. 10:3-6). In the East, eating together is equivalent to making a covenant, so those soldiers could never attack Israel again.

2 KINGS 7

When times are tough, people may respond in the following ways:

Blaming. Like his evil father Ahab who blamed Elijah for his woes, King Joram blamed Elisha for the plight of the city (1 Kings 18:17; 2 Kings 6:31), when in reality it was his own fault. He tore his clothes and wore sackcloth, but the king's actions did not impress God as long as his heart was hardened (2 Kings 6:30; Joel 2:12-14).

Doubting (1-2). The officer did not believe the word of God, and his unbelief caused his death (vv. 17-20). God will open the windows when we obey Him (Mal. 3:10).

Reasoning (3-8). The four lepers were logical in their reasoning: "If we give up, we will die. If we give in to the enemy, we may die, or we may live. Let's surrender to the enemy." But there was no enemy! God scattered them with a noise!

Sharing (9-16). The lepers moved from giving up and giving in to giving out. Sharing the good news helped to save the city. We are living in a day of good news. Are you sharing it? We are here not to give in or give up but to give out.

2 KINGS 8

God knows the future. The Shunammite woman experienced three tragedies: the death of her son, the uprooting of her household, and the loss of her property. And yet she was faithful to the Lord and had been kind to God's servant (2 Kings 4:8ff.). God helped her escape the famine and then used the miracle of her son's resurrection to help her regain her property. Romans 8:28 certainly proved true in her life! You may wonder why God permits some of your trials, but wait and see how He will use them!

God sees the heart. When he was desperate, Ben-Hadad wanted Elisha's help, but he did not want Elisha's God. The prophet saw the murder in Hazael's heart, but Hazael denied it was there. We do not know how wicked our hearts really are (Jer. 17:9), and we must cry out to God for His help (Ps. 51:5-6, 10).

God keeps His promises. Jehoshaphat was a godly man,

but he had married a daughter of Ahab (2 Chron. 18:1); and his son followed his bad example. Jehoram also followed the bad example of his father-in-law Ahab and allowed his evil wife to lead him into great sin. But God kept His promise to David (v. 19) and did not destroy Judah. He had purposes to fulfill through the godly remnant, for Judah would bring the Savior into the world.

2 KINGS 9—10

It is not pleasant to read the events recorded in these chapters, but we need to hear their message: *eventually sin is judged, and God's word is fulfilled*. God had ordained the anointing of Jehu (1 Kings 19:16) and the end of Ahab's family (1 Kings 21:21-26), and He kept His word.

King Joram of Israel was slain and so was King Ahaziah of Judah. Jezebel, the queen mother, was killed just as the prophet had predicted. Then Jehu wiped out all of Ahab's family and Ahaziah's relatives (who were also relatives of Ahab) and the followers of Baal.

“Sin is the only thing that God abhors. It brought Christ to the cross, it damns souls, it shuts heaven, it laid the foundations of hell.”

Thomas Brooks

Why was God so severe in His judgment? Because those leaders had turned the people away from the Lord and had polluted the nation. God had special work for His people to do (Gen. 12:1-3), and they could not do it if they were unfaithful to Him.

After displaying all that zeal, Jehu should have set the example in his devotion to Jehovah, but he did not. A nation does not become righteous simply by removing evil; it must also establish godliness. An empty house is an invitation to even worse tenants (Matt. 12:43-45), and they eventually came—and the nation had to be judged.

2 KINGS 11

The future of David's royal line was at stake when the queen mother slaughtered all the heirs, and her wicked deed also threatened the fulfillment of the promise of the Messiah. Satan's seed was at war with God's seed (Gen. 3:15), but God won the battle. The future rested in one little boy whom God protected in the temple.

Events around you may create doubts and fears in your heart, and you may wonder if God knows what is going on and if He cares. Rest assured that God not only knows and cares but that He is working out His purposes in spite of the evil deeds of wicked people. God does not need great armies to accomplish His plans. He can use a boy seven years old to change the course of a nation. Often when circumstances are the most difficult, God surprises you with a special victory. Trust Him!

2 KINGS 12

Young Jehoash was fortunate to have as his counselor Jehoiada the priest, husband of the woman who had saved the king's life (2 Chron. 22:11). Jehoiada gave the king God's Word (2 Kings 11:12) and taught him how to obey it. The secret of success in any venture for God is to honor His Word (Josh. 1:8). Do you let others strengthen you in the faith, and do you appreciate their ministry to you?

An idol-worshiping nation had allowed the temple to deteriorate. When we do not love God, we neglect the things important to God. A box by the altar was the ideal place for taking an offering. The sacrifices speak of our Lord's gracious work of redemption, and if that does not motivate us to give, nothing will (2 Cor. 8:9).

Jehoiada's death left Jehoash alone, and he led the nation back into sin (2 Chron. 24:15ff.). His religious zeal had not been very sincere. The king forgot the kindness of the high priest and even murdered his son. Jesus referred to this event in Matthew 23:34-35. It is not enough to promote religious works; we must have true devotion to God in our hearts. If your faith is "propped up" by others, what will you do when the "props" are gone?

2 KINGS 13

Hands of oppression. Jehoahaz followed the wrong example (v. 2) and brought Israel into bondage to foreign kings. Yet God was merciful to the disobedient king and His suffering people. As David wrote, “He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities” (Ps. 103:10). Thank God for that!

Hands of power. Elisha was a dying man, yet he was able to communicate the power of God to the king. One man of God was equal in power to the whole army of Israel (v. 14)!

Hands of opportunity. Lacking spiritual discernment, the king did not understand the will of God as he followed the prophet’s orders. Jehoash merely went through the motions, and as a result, he claimed only a limited victory over the enemy. He missed his opportunity and could never claim it again. What opportunity will God give you today that you may never have again?

*“The opportunity that God sends does not wake up
him who is asleep.”*

Sengalese Proverb

2 KINGS 14

King Amaziah made a fine beginning by following a good example, establishing justice in the land and obeying the Word of God (Deut. 24:16). But after he won a great victory over Edom, he became proud, and that led to his defeat.

Be content with your sphere of victory as the Lord gives you faith (Rom. 12:3). When you keep your eyes on the Lord, your victories will humble you, and God will get the glory. But when you forget the Lord, your victories will make you proud and lead you to defeat.

Beware the temptation to meddle. Learn to accept what God gives, stay at home, and do what He has called you to do. King Amaziah needed to heed Proverbs 16:18 and 26:17.

2 KINGS 15

As the time of reckoning drew near, the kingdoms of Israel and Judah suffered under the rule of men whose godless lives brought more and more trouble. Conspiracies abounded as God's law was ignored.

But there were two exceptions: Azariah (Uzziah) and his son Jotham, who followed his father's example. Unfortunately, Uzziah became proud and wanted to serve as a priest. The Lord punished him by making him a leper (2 Chron. 26:16ff.). It is the lesson of 2 Kings 14:10 all over again: accept the sphere of blessing God gives you and do not meddle with matters that are beyond you. (See Ps. 131.)

2 KINGS 16

Ahaz was a failure in his walk. He followed the wicked example of the kings of Israel. He was a descendant of David and should have obeyed the Word of God and trusted the God of the Word. Consciously or unconsciously, each of us follows various examples, and we must be sure they are the examples God wants us to follow.

Ahaz was a failure in his warfare. Because he had no faith in God, he was defeated by the enemy (1 John 5:4-5). He robbed God's temple to buy protection and he offered his son to a heathen god to secure help.

Ahaz also failed in his worship. Instead of following the divine pattern for the altar, he borrowed a pattern from a heathen temple (Exod. 25:40; 26:30). God's people do not need the novelties of the world (Rom. 12:2), no matter how attractive they may be. It is tragic when we try to worship God after the pattern of the world and not after the heavenly pattern. Building a different altar did not make Ahaz a better person. Are you looking for "religious novelties," or do you follow the pattern given by God in His Word?

2 KINGS 17

God's long-suffering ran out, and He called for Assyria to carry Israel away. What God did to Israel He can do to groups and individuals today. Consider some of their sins.

They forgot God's mercy (7) in saving them from Egyptian bondage. One of the best ways to remain true to the Lord is to remind yourself of all He has done for you (Ps. 103).

They imitated the ungodly (8) so that the true worship of Jehovah was corrupted by worldly practices. At first, they did those things secretly, but then the pagan practices were openly added to their worship of God.

They turned a deaf ear to the preaching of the prophets (13-18) and rejected the law of the Lord. When God disciplined them, they only hardened themselves more.

"They feared the LORD" but manufactured their own religion (25, 28, 32-34, 41)! Jehovah was "the God of the land" (v. 27) but not the only god. God rejected the religion of the Samaritans (John 4:19-24) as He rejects today all worship that is not "in spirit and truth."

2 KINGS 18—19

An idol within. Hezekiah removed all the idols from the land, including the brazen serpent that Moses had made (Num. 21:5-9). It is easy for God's people to make idols out of good things that outlive their usefulness.

An enemy without. Having conquered Israel, Assyria wanted to capture Judah. The nation was divided three ways: some wanted to give up to Assyria, others wanted to go to Egypt for help, and a minority wanted to trust the Lord for deliverance. Note the emphasis on the word *trust* in 18:19-25, and note that the enemy always has a bargain to offer (18:23). However, each bargain has a fatal "until" attached to it (18:31-32).

"Prayer is not conquering God's reluctance, but taking hold of God's willingness."

Phillips Brooks

An encouragement above. Hezekiah depended on the Word of God and prayer; he spread the matter before the Lord.

His only desire was to glorify the Lord before that heathen army (19:19). God gave him a message of peace and victory (19:6-7), and the enemy was defeated. God knows the battles you fight, and He will give you the help you need. Spread the matter before Him in faith, and seek to glorify His name.

2 KINGS 20

Verse 6 suggests that this event took place while Jerusalem was under siege by Assyria. It was bad enough that Judah was in danger, but the king was about to die. Sometimes it seems that troubles come in packs! Death is the last enemy we face (1 Cor. 15:26), and only God can give us victory over death.

Hezekiah was delivered because he prayed and used the means God provided for healing. Believing prayer can move God even to alter things in His universe just to meet our needs.

Hezekiah escaped the lion (1 Pet. 5:8) but succumbed to the serpent (vv. 12-19). He let the enemy know his secrets! Again, it was *pride*: “*my house, my treasures, my days.*” His great victory over Assyria gave him false confidence as he entertained the Babylonians. He mortgaged his people’s future by what he did and was thankful the defeat would not come in his own day.

Your decisions today will affect others tomorrow. Make the right decisions!

2 KINGS 21

Wicked King Ahaz fathered godly Hezekiah, and Hezekiah fathered evil King Manasseh whom the Lord allowed to reign for fifty-five years. King Manasseh was the father of godly King Josiah. Manasseh began his reign doing evil, but at the end of his life, he repented (2 Chron. 33:12). Josiah sought the Lord early in his life but closed his life disobeying God (2 Chron. 35:20ff.).

God’s ways are not our ways; He is free to work as He chooses. People who claim to see clear patterns in history or who lock divine providence into a fixed formula must keep this in mind. God punishes the disobedient and vindicates His

people but not always in the way or at the time that we expect. Ponder Psalm 73.

Sometimes God permits evil men to rule so that He may test His people or chasten them. We sometimes can do very little about world affairs, but we can pray for persons in authority (1 Tim. 2:1-8) and be faithful to obey God (Rom. 13).

2 KINGS 22

At the age of sixteen, Josiah began to seek the Lord and live for Him. Was his mother a special godly influence in his life? Her name means "beloved" and is very much like the Lord's "pet name" for Solomon (2 Sam. 12:25). Certainly Hilkiah the high priest saw to it that the young king honored the Lord. Never underestimate the power of godly influence.

Manasseh rebuilt everything that his father tore down (2 Kings 21:3), but Josiah tore down what Manasseh built up (2 Chron. 34:3-7). But reformation alone will not change people; there must be repentance and renewal within the heart. That came with the finding of the Law in the temple. (Imagine losing the Word of God in the house of God!)

It is good to *have* God's Word; it is even better to *hear* God's Word; but the greatest blessing of all is to *heed* God's Word (James 1:19-25). The king humbled himself before the Lord, and God spared the land.

Have you "lost" the Word of God somewhere, even in the midst of a religious life? Does God still speak to you, and do you obey?

2 KINGS 23

The temple was really in bad shape when Josiah began his reformation. The priests had lost the Word of God in the temple (22:8) and had permitted idolatrous things to accumulate there. When God's truth is neglected, it is easy for the false to move in and take over. Perhaps our lives and our churches could use a good "housecleaning" occasionally!

Josiah's work was the fulfillment of the prophecy that had been made years before (1 Kings 13:1-5). As he obeyed the Word of God, he removed what was evil and practiced what was good. The observance of Passover reminded the people

that they belonged to the Lord and must put evil out of their lives.

It is sad that Josiah became proud and dared Pharaoh to fight him (2 Chron. 35:20–25). That led to his death and the ultimate downfall of the kingdom of Judah. Amaziah had made the same mistake (2 Kings 14:9–20).

2 KINGS 24—25

A series of weak and ungodly rulers led Judah into ruin as the sins of Manasseh came up for judgment. The consequences of decisions may not appear immediately, but they eventually come. Leaders may forget their decisions, but their decisions will not forget them. “Be sure your sin will find you out” is the sure word of God (Num. 32:23).

The nation had been rotting away at the center for years and was no match for the mighty Babylonian army. The king was captured, the city and temple were destroyed, and the people were taken into captivity. During the period of the judges, God had chastened them *in* the land; now He would chasten them *outside* their land. If they wanted to live like the idolaters, let them live *with* the idolaters.

As they were led off into captivity, do you think any of the people remembered Solomon’s prayer to God (1 Kings 8:46–53) or God’s message to Solomon (1 Kings 9:1–9)?

Submit to God

The governor urged the Jews to submit to God’s chastening in Babylon and be good citizens (2 Kings 25:24). The prophet Jeremiah wrote them a letter saying the same thing (Jer. 29). When God chastens us, we only make matters worse when we resent it and resist it. We should yield to our Father’s loving will and let Him work out His purposes (Heb. 12:1–11).

1 and 2 CHRONICLES



The record in these books parallels that in Samuel and Kings. The focus is on David and the kingdom of Judah and the viewpoint is that of the priests. The opening genealogy takes you from Adam to Saul (1 Chron. 1–10), and that is followed by an account of David's reign (chaps. 11–29). Second Chronicles opens with the reign of Solomon (chaps. 1–9) and then describes the kings of Judah from the division of the kingdom to the captivity (chaps. 10–36).

These books were important to the Jews who returned to the land after the captivity. The genealogy established their tribal connections, something especially significant to the priests (Ezra 2:59–62). The people needed David's example of godliness, and the emphasis on the temple was needed at a time when it had to be rebuilt. The books of 1 and 2 Chronicles encourage people seeking to rebuild in a time of change and difficulty.

As you read 1 and 2 Chronicles, you will want to note the cross-references to Samuel and Kings and compare complementary passages.

1 CHRONICLES

1 CHRONICLES 1—9

You see nine chapters of unfamiliar names, many of them hard to pronounce, and you are tempted to skip them and get to the story. But stop to consider the importance of these chapters.

These names belonged to real people who once lived on this earth. Now most of them are forgotten, their names buried in an ancient list. One day *you* will be a name in a record file somewhere. History may forget you, but heaven never will. Are you living in the light of eternity (1 John 2:15–17)? Make your life count today.

These names were written on earth because these people were born on earth. The most vital listing is in heaven, the names of those who have been born again through faith in Jesus Christ (Luke 10:20; Phil. 4:3). Is your name written there?

These names belonged to what we would call “ordinary people.” They were not all great men of faith like Abraham and David, but they all played a part in the working out of God’s plan in this world. You may not consider yourself of consequence, but you are; every child of God has a place in God’s heart and in His plan. Make yourself available to Him for the task He wants you to do, no matter how humble or unrecognized it may seem to you or to others.

These names belonged to Jews, one nation, called of God to witness for Him in a dark and wicked world. They were not always faithful, but through them, the world received witness of the one true and living God. They gave us the written Word of God, and in due time, they gave us the Savior. If nothing else, pause to give thanks for Israel, and “pray for the peace of Jerusalem” (Ps. 122:6).

For different reasons, some names stand out in this list. Abram had his name changed (1:27). Achan is identified as a troublemaker (2:7). Jabez had a sad name (“He will cause pain” [4:9–10]), but he overcame the stigma because he trusted the Lord. Reuben sinned away his birthright, which was given to the sons of Joseph (5:1). Joseph had refused to sin, so God honored him (Gen. 39). A father’s sin can make a difference to the future of his family.

Read these chapters carefully. Here and there, you may meet some people who will warn you, challenge you, and even encourage you.

“There is no such thing [as great people]! The greatest man or woman is 99 percent just like yourself.”

G. B. Shaw

1 CHRONICLES 10

King Saul’s life is ignored as the writer focuses on his death. He was a man with a good beginning and a tragic ending, and the reason is given in verses 13–14: he was unfaithful to the Lord and disobeyed His Word.

First Samuel 13–31 records Saul’s gradual decline. He ran ahead of the Lord and offered a sacrifice. He spared King Agag and then lied to the Lord about it. He wanted recognition from Samuel and the people even though God had deserted him. He envied David and tried to destroy him. He wasted God-given opportunities for repentance. Finally, he turned to Satan for help and ended up committing suicide.

Not belonging to the tribe of Judah, Saul was never meant to establish the dynasty (Gen. 49:10), but that was not the cause of his sin. He could have been a godly leader and prepared the way for David, but Saul would not obey. Alexander Whyte quoted a relevant comment by Thomas Shepard: “Oh,

the grievous shipwrecks of some great ships! We see some boards and planks lying in the mud at low water, but that is all!"

1 CHRONICLES 11

Some people become leaders because God chooses them in a special way and anoints them for a special work. That is how David came to the throne. In contrast to Saul, David was faithful to the Lord.

Others become leaders because people like David challenge them to do their best. Joab became head of the army because he conquered a stronghold, and all of David's "mighty men" won their way into the inner circle of heroes. David was a mighty leader, but he could not accomplish anything alone. We all need one another.

Greatness is often shown more in little things than in big things. Real leaders see greatness in places where others may see little or nothing. David did not see water in the vessel; he saw the blood of the men who risked their lives to satisfy his desire. It is not what a thing *is* or *does* that impresses a leader, but what a thing *costs his people*. D. L. Moody observed, "There are many of us that are willing to do great things for the Lord; but few of us are willing to do little things." And only God can make the "little things" great!

1 CHRONICLES 12

Saul *drafted* men into his army (1 Sam. 14:52) while David *attracted* them because of his character and leadership. In fact, some of his best men came from Saul's tribe! Saul seemed to bring out the worst in people while David brought out the best.

If Jesus Christ were recruiting an army on earth today, how many of us would qualify? He seeks skilled people (v. 2), trained people (v. 8), people not afraid to get their feet wet (v. 15). He wants soldiers with loyal hearts (vv. 16-18) who know how to keep rank and face the enemy together (vv. 33, 38). He needs people who understand the times (v. 32).

Are you a volunteer? Are you willing for the Lord to make

you qualified? The only winning army is the Lord's army. "The real great man is the man who makes every man feel great," according to Gilbert K. Chesterton.

1 CHRONICLES 13

A unanimous decision is not always a right decision, and enthusiasm is not the best test of truth. Were David's motives mixed as he sought to bring the ark home? Was the king subtly promoting himself as well as glorifying the Lord (v. 3)? Perhaps.

One thing is sure: David did not pause to seek the Lord's direction in the venture. It was his habit to seek the will of God before he acted, but that time, he failed. Any Levite could have told him how to do the job!

The ark was God's throne (Ps. 99:1), and the throne of God does not depend on the hand of man for support or protection. Had the ark been where it belonged, on the shoulders of the Levites, Uzza would have lived. No matter how successful at the beginning, man's methods *without God* will ultimately fail. The time to find out how to do His work is before the job begins, not after the funeral.

1 CHRONICLES 14

David had his disappointments, but he did not allow them to keep him from getting things done. It has been said that the only people who never make mistakes are the people who never make anything. To permit past blunders to keep us from fulfilling present duties is to make those blunders even worse.

As you seek to serve the Lord, you will discover that friends will help you (v. 1), the Lord will establish you (v. 2), and the enemy will fight you (vv. 8-17). Building and battling are normal experiences in the life of faith (Luke 14:25-33). Be like Nehemiah's workers on the wall, and have a tool in one hand and a ready weapon in the other (Neh. 4:17).

Twice David sought the mind of the Lord as he confronted his old enemies. Unlike Joshua at Ai, he did not assume that what worked once would work again (Josh. 7). Depending on past victories is a good way to guarantee future defeats. Ponder Judges 16:20-22.

1 CHRONICLES 15

Do God's work biblically (1–15). David turned the work over to the Levites, and 870 of them united to bring the ark to Jerusalem. They had no problems because they did it God's way.

Do God's work joyfully (16–24). They served “the LORD with gladness” (Ps. 100:2). Singers and musicians joined their talents in praising the Lord joyfully (vv. 16, 24). Harps, horns, trumpets, and even cymbals accompanied the singers' hymns of thanksgiving and praise.

Do God's work sacrificially (25–26). If they are to be acceptable to the Lord, our worship and service must come from the altar where a price has been paid. Cheap ministry is powerless ministry that cannot bless people or glorify the Lord.

Do God's work fervently (27–29). It was an enthusiastic procession with the Levites singing and playing instruments, the people shouting, and David leading them in praising the Lord. There are times when you should be silent before the Lord, but there are times when He wants to hear your praise. Vance Havner noted, “Too many church services start at eleven o'clock sharp and end at twelve o'clock dull.”

1 CHRONICLES 16

Special times of praise and celebration are good to have, but you cannot live on these experiences. A satisfying walk with the Lord depends on daily worship of the Lord. That is why David assigned Asaph and the Levites their work in the ministry of worship “as every day's work required” (v. 37). Sacrifice and praise were parts of their daily service, as they should be in your life.

The main thing is to focus on the Lord, and David did just that in the special psalm he wrote. (For parallels, see Pss. 96; 105.) “The LORD” is named fourteen times as David reminds the people of God's works (vv. 8–13), God's words (vv. 14–22) and God's wonder (vv. 23–36)—His glory, greatness, and goodness. The excitement of the day would disappear, but the inspired song of praise would remain for all generations to use in worshipping God.

But after you have worshiped, remember to witness to the

lost (v. 23) and to do your part in getting the Gospel out to the nations of the world (vv. 24, 31). Archbishop William Temple pointed out the essential nature of worship: "For to worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God."

1 CHRONICLES 17

Nathan was too quick to encourage David in the noble enterprise of building a house for the Lord (Josh. 9:14). How did Nathan know that was God's will for David? But the prophet's ear was ever open to God's voice (Amos 3:7), and he received from God the words that he delivered to David the next day.

Ten times in this chapter David is called "servant." The servant does not command the master; the master commands the servant. And what a wonderful Master the Lord is! Whether we look at the past ("I took you" [v. 7]; "I have been with you" [v. 8]), or the future (God says "I will" ten times), we see the grace and goodness of the Lord. How David was humbled by the goodness of the Lord!

It is one thing to *know* God's promises and quite something else to *claim them by faith*. Like a little child, David went in and "sat before the LORD." He thanked God for the mercies He had promised, and then he said, "Lord, do it!" Faith turns God's promises into reality, but before praying, take time to praise Him.

1 CHRONICLES 18

David defeated four great enemies because the Lord was with him. But David saw them as more than wars: they were opportunities to claim more territory for the Lord and gather more wealth for His treasury. He looked beyond the battle to the temple.

David reasoned, "If I cannot build the Lord's temple, at least I can help my son do it." One generation's victories can help build the next generation's temples. David dedicated to the Lord the spoils he won and the gifts and tribute he received. (See 1 Chron. 28.)

Each enemy can give you something to help build God's work on earth. Temptation is the opportunity to get the treasure without first winning the battle. Faith overcomes the enemy and claims the spoils for the Lord.

Benaiah

In the Old Testament record, the name Benaiah belongs to at least a dozen men, but the most fascinating of all is the man mentioned in 1 Chronicles 18:17. He was born a priest (1 Chron. 27:5) but became a soldier. He began his military career as one of David's mighty men (2 Sam. 23: 20-23) and was put over David's personal bodyguard. Eventually, Benaiah became head of Solomon's army (1 Kings 2:35). He could have enjoyed a relatively safe and easy life as a priest, but he chose the dangerous life of a soldier to serve his king. He "killed a lion in the midst of a pit on a snowy day" (2 Sam. 23:20). Frank Boreham wrote, "He met the worst of enemies, in the worst of places, under the worst of conditions; and he won." What a man!

1 CHRONICLES 19

If you fear a person and consider him or her your enemy, nothing that person does will please you. Instead of taking his or her words and actions at face value, you get suspicious. Malice poisons us to the point that our ears hear nothing good and our eyes see nothing good, no matter what that person may say or do. (See 1 Pet. 2:1-3.)

Hanun's actions were a public offense against David, so he

had to act, especially when he saw the Ammonites getting ready for war. But what should Christians do when they are handed evil in return for good?

Consider these verses when deciding what action to take: "Love . . . does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil" (1 Cor. 13:5); "In return for my love they are my accusers, but I give myself to prayer" (Ps. 109:4); "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34). Ponder Matthew 5:10-12, 43-48, and then ask God to help you practice it. Francis Bacon commented on the situation: "In taking revenge, a man is but even with his enemy; but in passing it over, he is superior."

1 CHRONICLES 20

Not a word is offered here about David's tarrying in Jerusalem and committing adultery with the wife of Uriah, one of his mighty men. But the story had already been written in 2 Samuel, and there was no need to repeat it. However, the writer gave an account of David's sin of numbering the people (chap. 21). Sins of the spirit can be more insidious than sins of the flesh (2 Cor. 7:1). You may be tempted more often by pride than by the lusts of the flesh.

Joab and the army won the war, but David came to the battlefield in time to direct the final victory and then claim the crown. It was a heavy one: seventy-five pounds of gold! But all crowns are heavy, for it is not an easy thing to be a leader.

Giants have a way of multiplying! David had killed Goliath, but other giants remained; and God had His servants ready to defeat them. We remember David and Goliath and tend to forget these other heroes, but God remembers them.

1 CHRONICLES 21

Pride: David and Joab (1-6). Satan attacks leaders and it behooves us to pray for them. He appealed to David's pride by encouraging him to find out the size of his kingdom. David was stubborn as well as proud, and his attitude got Israel into real trouble.

Humility: David and the Lord (7-17). When David realized his sins, he confessed to the Lord and was forgiven, but he still had to bear the consequences (Gal. 6:7-8). Dressed in

sackcloth, David publicly begged God to stop the plague. What a picture of humility!

Obedience: David and Ornan (18–30). In the hour of penitence and prayer, we will hear a word from God. God brought that word to David. David could have claimed the property and sacrifices, but the Lord would not have been pleased. David said “I will not take what is yours for the LORD, nor offer burnt offerings with that which costs me nothing” (v. 24). Do you look for the easy way out when sin catches up with you? Our Savior did not have it easy when He paid for our sins on the cross.

1 CHRONICLES 22

Preparation. So David made “abundant preparations before his death” (v. 5). He was making preparations not for dying but for building the temple. (The idea of *preparation* is found five times in this chapter.) For years, David had been preparing for this great project and gathering materials (vv. 3–4). He had risked his life in battle and claimed the spoils for the Lord. His reputation was that of a soldier, but his heart was that of a builder.

Promise. David claimed God’s promise and used it to encourage his son, a young man with little practical experience. The work we do is for God, and it must be our best.

Prosperity. You cannot escape the basic principle stated in Joshua 1:8 (vv. 11–13): if we obey God’s Word, He will prosper our work. David had collected over forty million tons of gold and silver, but all that wealth was of no value apart from the blessing of God.

Partners. We cannot do God’s work alone; we need helpers (vv. 2, 15, 17–19). Leaders, stonemasons, timber cutters—all were a part of the work, and each worker was important.

1 CHRONICLES 23—27

A beautiful and costly temple is a waste of money unless ministry is going on for the good of God’s people and the glory of God. So, before he died, David organized the temple workers and put them under proper leadership: “Let all things be done decently and in order” (1 Cor. 14:40).

The work of the Lord called for dedicated service from

many kinds of people: priests, Levites, musicians, treasurers, gatekeepers, soldiers, and state officers. Each of us has a calling from the Lord and we must be faithful to take our place and do our job. We are helping to build the church, and we must give God our best (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 2:19–22).

Being a musician himself, David was no doubt especially concerned that the music in the temple be the finest available. God gave him people who were skillful and trained (25:7), but their task was not to magnify their talents: they were to glorify their Lord (25:3). Do you open and close each day with praise to the Lord (23:30)?

1 CHRONICLES 28—29

A disappointed heart (28:2). Instead of complaining because he could not build God's house, David began preparing to help Solomon do the job. David served his own generation and generations to come because he unselfishly served the Lord. When disappointments come into your life, how do you handle them?

A loyal heart (28:9). Solomon had all that he needed for building the temple, but the most important thing only he could supply: a heart loyal to God. His motives had to be right, or his work would not be blessed.

A generous heart (29:9, 17). The people joined their king in generously giving to the Lord. Of course, whatever we give Him, He has first given us (29:11–15). There were even gifts from the past, from Samuel, Saul, and Abner (26:28).

A devoted heart (29:17–18). "Fix their heart toward You" means "Keep them loyal and devoted to You." In his latter years, Solomon's heart turned away from the Lord (1 Kings 11:3). That can happen to any of us, so we must heed Proverbs 4:23. Why should we generously give to the Lord? David's song of praise in 29:10–15 presents some reasons: God is great (vv. 10–12); God deserves glory (v. 13); God has given so much to us (v. 14); life is short and we must make it count (v. 15). Take comfort in this truth: "He who does the will of God abides forever" (1 John 2:17).

2 CHRONICLES

2 CHRONICLES 1

The ruler. God “exalted him exceedingly” (v. 1). Solomon could strengthen his kingdom, but only God could exalt his name. If Solomon had tried to exalt himself, God would have disciplined him (1 Pet.5:5).

The worshiper. Solomon’s hands were filled with sacrifices for the Lord; his ears were open to the word of the Lord; his heart was devoted to the service of the Lord. His great desire was to be capable of serving his people with wisdom, and God granted that desire. Have you asked God for wisdom (James 1:5)?

The trader. King Solomon had a flair for foreign trade. In spite of the admonition in Deuteronomy 17:16–17, he amassed silver and gold and multiplied horses. David had only 100 chariots (1 Chron. 18:4), but his son added 1,300 more. Trade brought wealth to the nation, but it may have been the beginning of Solomon’s downfall (1 Kings 11). Oliver Goldsmith wrote, “Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,/Where wealth accumulates and men decay.”

2 CHRONICLES 2—4

The plans for both the temple and the tabernacle were given by God; in both projects, the people were permitted to share their gifts. There was one difference: God’s Spirit equipped two Jewish men to make the tabernacle and its furnishings (Exod. 31), but an artisan from outside Israel supervised the construction of the temple. Had God’s Spirit failed to equip anybody for the task? Or was that another one of Solomon’s ways to build strong bonds with his neighbors?

At least his motives were pure: he built the house “for the name of the LORD” (2:1). He used the best materials (“pure gold,” “fine gold”), and he laid a good foundation (3:3). The apostle Paul surely had Solomon’s temple in mind when he wrote 1 Corinthians 3:10–17.

The pillars (3:17) in God’s spiritual temple, the church, are dedicated people who serve Him devotedly (Gal. 2:9). Are you a pillar, or must you lean on others?

2 CHRONICLES 5

The beautiful temple was empty until God’s throne was put in place (vv. 2–10) and God’s glory filled the house (vv. 13–14). When Moses dedicated the tabernacle, the glory came in when the work was finished (Exod. 40:33–38). It was the song of praise that brought the glory into the temple. When you worship with God’s people, does your praise increase His glory in the assembly?

The tables of the Law were still in the ark (v. 10), but the pot of manna and Aaron’s rod were no longer there (Heb. 9:4). Some things God does are temporary, and we must not make permanent institutions out of them.

David had carefully organized the priests and Levites, but that order was forgotten as they led the worship on that holy day (v. 11). There are times when the Spirit of God ignores our plans and procedures and reveals God’s glory in a new way. Let Him do it! We are not to worship organization; we are to worship God.

2 CHRONICLES 6

In his dedication address and prayer, King Solomon looked in five different directions.

He looked back (1–11). He recalled how God chose him to build the temple.

He looked up (12–21). He asked God to fulfill the covenant promises He had made with David. The covenant included the coming into this world of the Son of David, Jesus Christ, who was born of the house of David.

He looked ahead (22–31). Solomon asked God to help His

people in various trials of life, particularly to forgive them when they sinned. Coming to the temple, or looking toward the temple, and praying to God would bring them forgiveness. In this chapter, there are numerous references to prayer.

He looked around (32–35). The king called on God to help the Gentiles. The temple was to be “a house of prayer for all nations” (Isa. 56:7); God’s desire was that Israel bring blessing to all the world (Gen. 12:1–3).

He looked within (36–40). He ended his prayer by pleading for forgiveness for sinning Israel. His words must have been very meaningful to the Jews taken captive to Babylon four centuries later.

The temple is gone, but the record of that great day of dedication remains to encourage and bless God’s people. Read the chapter again, and note the promises you can claim today. In his closing prayer (vv. 41–42), Solomon asked God to bless everybody present: the priests, the people, and himself as God’s anointed king. But any blessing that came would result from God’s mercy and His promises to David. David could not build the temple or attend the dedication service, but he was there just the same!

2 CHRONICLES 7

Fire and glory. The fire came to devour, and the glory came to dwell. There was glory at the start of the service (2 Chron. 5:14) and glory at the close! But there could be no glory apart from the sacrifices that took care of the sins of the people. Isaiah saw God’s glory, but before he was ready for service, he had to feel the fire (Isa. 6:1–8). Most of us want the glory, but we resist the fire.

Falling and feasting. This demonstration of God’s power and glory brought the people to their knees, but when the service ended, they rejoiced with feasting. Contradictory? Not in the least. We are to “serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling” (Ps. 2:11). It was said of Moses and some others: “So they saw God, and they ate and drank” (Exod. 24:11).

Promise and warning. What an encouragement to know that God hears our prayers! God graciously granted what the king asked for, but He added a word of caution: “These bless-

ings are given when My children obey." Disobedience brings discipline, not because God hates us but because He loves us and wants to bless us even more.

Prayer went up, fire came down, and glory moved in. Could you ask for more?

2 CHRONICLES 8

David was known for his battles, Solomon for his buildings. It was a time of peace, so the opportunities and resources for building were available.

It is disappointing that Solomon married a foreign woman who could not be identified with the Lord's throne. God wants each home to be a tabernacle (Isa. 4:5-6); He wants His children to enjoy His presence (2 Cor. 6:14-7:1). Apparently in this decision, Solomon was concerned more about politics than about piety.

Solomon was faithful in his public worship despite these inconsistencies in his life, and he continued to increase the wealth of the nation. But the people were not growing in the things of the Lord. Alexander Whyte wrote that "the secret worm . . . was gnawing all the time in the royal staff upon which Solomon leaned."

The most important part of your life is the part that only God sees. Are you concerned about character—or reputation?

2 CHRONICLES 9

Wealth and wisdom are the central themes of this chapter; gold is mentioned sixteen times and wisdom six times. According to King Solomon, wisdom is better than wealth (Prov. 3:13-15; 8:10-11), although most people today would probably rather have money. They measure life by prices, not values.

If you want gold, silver, and jewels, you must dig for them. Very little treasure lies on the ground, convenient to pick up. If you want wisdom, you must "seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures" (Prov. 2:4). That means work! It means taking time to read, meditate, pray, and put truth into practice.

The only convenient materials you will find are wood, hay,

and straw, but they will not last (1 Cor. 3:10–15). To sacrifice the permanent for the immediate is folly, not wisdom.

2 CHRONICLES 10—11

The chronicler does not mention Solomon's apostasy or God's warning (1 Kings 11–13), but he does record Rehoboam's folly. You would think *younger* men would recommend easier lives for the people, for youth is generally a carefree time. But the king's friends did not have to bear any of the burdens, and their decision made them appear strong. They used the people to advance their authority instead of using their authority to help the people. (See Matt. 23:4; Gal. 6:2.)

Some divisions are of God (11:4), even though they create problems and cause hurts. For one thing, divisions force people to make decisions, and the decisions they make reveal the kind of people they are. The priests and Levites left Israel and came to Judah because they wanted to serve in the true temple and be ruled by a king from David's line.

God's program for this world is to bring things together in Christ (Eph. 1:10), and He will succeed despite man's rebellion. The devil's program is to tear things apart. Which side are you helping?

2 CHRONICLES 12

Rehoboam refused to serve the Lord or the people, so he ended up serving Egypt. God wanted him to learn the difference between His easy yoke and the heavy yoke of sin (v. 8; Deut. 28:47–48). Some people must learn the hard way. Are you one of them?

No matter how strong you think you are, your strength becomes weakness if you forsake the Lord. Rehoboam relied on his fortified cities for protection, and the Egyptians took every one of them. His son Abijah would rely on the Lord and win a great victory (2 Chron. 13:18). Where is your faith today?

Solomon's treasures became Egypt's spoils because the king turned away from God. The king and the elders humbled themselves before God, but they could not escape the consequences of their sin. God spared them from wrath, but He per-

mitted them to suffer. Alexander Maclaren stated, "Every sin is a mistake, as well as a wrong; and the epitaph for the sinner is, 'Thou fool!'"

2 CHRONICLES 13

The army of Israel had strategy and great numbers, but it did not have God. It was twice as big as Judah's army (Luke 14:31-32), but by the time the battle was over, Israel had lost 500,000 soldiers.

"God Himself is with us as our head," King Abijah announced (v. 12). He obviously believed that "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31). Abijah had his faith in the God of the covenant who always keeps His promises (v. 5). He was living by faith and not by sight.

For a brief moment, it looked like Israel would win, but God gave Judah the victory. Their "secret weapon" was back in Jerusalem: their faithful worship of the Lord (vv. 8-11). They kept the commandments of the Lord, and He kept His promises to them. Public victories are the result of private ministries to the Lord. Those who rejoice before the Lord can rely on the Lord.

2 CHRONICLES 14-16

Asa is another sad example of a man who made a splendid beginning but had a tragic ending. Early in his reign, he relied on the Lord, and God gave him a great victory. Then he believed the prophet's message and removed the idols from the land and called the people to reaffirm their allegiance to the Lord. He even deposed the queen mother for her idolatry!

But when he had been king thirty-six years, he stopped relying on the Lord. He took the Lord's treasures and bought protection from a heathen king! The prophet Hanani told the king what was wrong: his heart was not loyal to the Lord (16:9). Instead of humbling himself and obeying, as he had done before, in anger Asa resisted the Word and God's servant (James 1:19). When we are wrong, we should admit it instead of trying to resist God. God is much stronger than our stubbornness.

God is with us—seek Him (15:2). God answers prayer—trust Him (15:4). God rewards faithfulness—obey Him (15:7). You

never outgrow the ability to sin. Noah was a mature man when he got drunk (Gen. 9:20-23), and so was Abraham when he lied about his wife (Gen. 12:10ff.). Moses was a seasoned leader when he lost his temper (Num. 20), and so was David when he committed adultery and murder. Asa's corpse lay on a bed of fragrant spices, but his name was not as fragrant as it had been. Ponder Proverbs 10:7, Ecclesiastes 7:1 and 1 Corinthians 10:12.

2 CHRONICLES 17—18

Jehoshaphat's life is described in Psalm 1:1-3. He walked in the right counsel (17:3), he delighted in God's ways (17:6), and he was fruitful in his service, sharing the Word with the people (17:7-9). He practiced the fear of the Lord, so he was protected by the fear of the Lord. When you fear God, you need fear nothing else (Ps. 112).

But Jehoshaphat married the wrong wife, joined the wrong allies, fought the wrong war, and almost came to the wrong end. By walking "in the counsel of the ungodly" and sitting with the scornful (18:9; Ps. 1:1), the king found himself in serious trouble. He had to listen to false prophets and go to battle with a king depending on false confidence.

The pressure to conform is greater today than in that day. Are you resisting it? Can you detect the false prophet and his message, or are you impressed with his "visual aids" and pleasing message (18:10)? Read the last three verses of Psalm 1 and beware!

2 CHRONICLES 19

Jehoshaphat returned home safely only because God was gracious to him and protected him in the battle. When we are out of the will of God and get into places of danger, we tempt God, and it is a sin to tempt God and force Him to work miracles on our behalf. That is the way Satan tempted the Lord Jesus (Matt. 4:5-7).

He submitted to God's Word and went back to ministering to his people. While he was away fighting somebody else's battle, his own people were being neglected (Song of Sol. 1:6). Like a good shepherd, he sought the lost and brought them back to

the Lord (Ezek. 34:1–10), and he saw to it that the people were protected by honest judges and served by godly priests.

Note the emphasis on the fear of the Lord (vv. 7, 9). Jehoshaphat had sinned, but God forgave him. The result of forgiveness should be the fear of the Lord (Ps. 130:4). John Calvin wrote, “True piety consists . . . in a pure and true zeal which loves God altogether, and reveres Him truly as Lord, embraces his justice and dreads to offend Him more than to die.”

2 CHRONICLES 20

Seek the Lord. When you see big problems on the horizon, seek the Lord before you do anything else. What does that mean? It means to do what Jehoshaphat and Judah did. They remembered who God is (v. 6), what He did in the past (v. 7) and what He said He would do in the future (vv. 8–9). It means to trust Him and keep your eyes on Him by faith (v. 12).

Hear the Lord. God always has a special word for those who turn to Him for help. When you face a battle, spend much time in His Word and in prayer, for then He will give you that needed word of encouragement.

Praise the Lord. The battle was won by the singers, standing in the most dangerous place of all—between two armies. But they sang the Lord’s praises and routed the enemy. The choir praised God after God gave the word (v. 19), before the battle (v. 21), and after the victory (vv. 26–28), a good pattern for us to follow in our praise.

In Hebrew, *Berachah* means “blessing” (v. 26). Even a valley can become a place of blessing if we learn how to praise the Lord. “Prayer changes things” is a familiar saying that is certainly true. But it is also true that “praise changes things.” Why? Because true praise changes people, and God can work in and through people who praise Him. True praise involves faith, hope, and love, the strongest weapons in the Christian armory.

2 CHRONICLES 21

God kept His promise to maintain David’s descendants on the throne of Judah, but He also kept His promise to chasten

them if they disobeyed Him (2 Sam. 7:12-17). He disciplined Jehoram in several ways.

To begin with, Jehoram's rule began to disintegrate as the Edomites revolted and the Philistines invaded. Even the Levitical city of Libnah revolted (v. 10; Josh. 21:13). Life starts to fall apart when you stop obeying the Lord.

Elijah's letter warned the king and gave him opportunity to repent, but Jehoram went his own way. What a privilege to get a letter from a famous prophet! And what a tragedy to treat it with disdain. The king died in severe pain, and nobody regretted it. Yet he was the son of the great Jehoshaphat.

If you received a loving letter of warning today, how would you respond to it?

2 CHRONICLES 22—23

Corruption. The British poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge called mothers "the holiest thing alive," but you could not apply those words to Athaliah. Imagine a mother teaching her son how to sin! She was the Old Testament version of Herodias (Matt. 14:1-12), just the opposite of godly Hannah (1 Sam. 1-2). But what else would you expect from the daughter of Jezebel and Ahab? Athaliah was the only woman to rule over the kingdom of Judah, and it was a rule of evil.

Coronation. But God had another woman on the scene, the godly wife of the high priest, and she did the will of God in saving the infant Joash. At the right time, her husband orchestrated the coronation of Joash and the condemnation of Athaliah. Note the three covenants involved: with the army (23:1), with the king (23:3), and with the Lord (23:16).

Contribution. We cannot escape David! He provided the king (23:3), the weapons (23:9), and the temple organization and music (23:18). But how long can Judah live on the dividends of the spiritual investments made by godly men and women of previous generations? *How long can God's church today?*

2 CHRONICLES 24

Joash did many fine things, but he was a "leaner." As long as godly Jehoiada was on the scene, the king obeyed the Lord,

and the temple prospered. But after the high priest died, the king began listening to other counselors; soon he led the nation into sin.

When you truly obey God's Word, you do it regardless of the messenger. If you lean on others and fail to develop spiritual depth, your spiritual life will be gone when those people are gone. Joash would not listen to the prophets and he even killed one of them (vv. 19-21). God abandoned the people, the army was defeated (v. 24; see also Deut. 32:30), and the king was assassinated.

The godly priest was buried with the kings (v. 16), but the ungodly king was not (v. 25). Joash was untrue to his friends and treated them like enemies (Prov. 27:6, 10, 17). He refused to listen to God and became another example of a man who made a good beginning but came to a tragic ending. Henry Ford commented, "My best friend is the one who brings out the best in me."

2 CHRONICLES 25

Amaziah was halfhearted in his religious life and was not loyal to the Lord. Instead of trusting God for victory, he hired men from Israel; then he worried about the money he would lose if he obeyed the Lord! Once you start measuring obedience by profit and loss, you are not living by faith (Matt. 6:33). When you start asking yourself, "Is it profitable?" instead of "Is it right?" you had better read Philippians 2:1-11 and Hebrews 11:24-26.

Amaziah argued with God's will but finally obeyed it; then the army became angry with him and declared war! They had been paid, so they should have gone home rejoicing, but they wanted a chance to fight and get spoils of war. Such is the wickedness of the human heart. Amaziah lost money and was upset; the soldiers made money and were angry. Money does not satisfy the heart.

The king refused to hear God's servant and threatened to kill him (vv. 15-16), but in the end, Amaziah died. He lived for the wrong values and by the wrong counsel, and he died a failure. God is seeking disciples who are wholehearted (Matt. 6:19-24).

2 CHRONICLES 26

The *starting point* in Uzziah's success was his seeking God and wanting to do His will (v. 5). Unlike his father, Uzziah was a man wholly given to the Lord. He believed and practiced Joshua 1:8 and Psalm 1:1-3.

The *turning point* was his pride (v. 16). He became famous (vv. 8, 15) and strong, and God helped him wonderfully (vv. 7, 15); but he could not handle success. If God's blessings do not humble us, they will eventually destroy us. It is true that "a man's pride will bring him low" (Prov. 29:23; see also Prov. 11:2; 16:18).

The *finishing point* was his isolation as a leper (vv. 19-21). Not content to be a king, he also wanted to be a priest. He did not respect the boundaries God had established, so God shut him in a narrow place as a leper. God gives the wide places to those He can trust with freedom (Ps. 18:16-19).

Uzziah did not commit a gross sin of the flesh. *He sinned in the realm of spiritual things.* It is possible to disobey God in the temple with a censer in your hand, but if you do, expect God to deal with you drastically.

The Peril of Pride

In his pride, Moses lost his temper and was kept out of the Promised Land (Num. 20:1-13). Pride kept Joshua from seeking God's will at Ai, and he lost the battle (Josh. 7). King Nebuchadnezzar's pride turned him into an animal (Dan. 4), and Peter's pride led to his denial of Christ (Luke 22:31-34). "No matter how dear you are to God," said Charles Haddon Spurgeon, "if pride is harbored in your spirit, He will whip it out of you. They that go up in their own estimation must come down again by His discipline."

2 CHRONICLES 27

Uzziah sinned and was disciplined by the Lord, but that one event did not destroy his godly influence. His son Jotham followed his father's example but avoided his father's sin, and the Lord honored him.

Jotham lived a brief life and had a short reign, but he was faithful to the Lord. It is not how long we live that counts but *how* we live. Although Jotham's chapter in Chronicles is short, 1 John 2:17 is still true.

2 CHRONICLES 28

The spiritual leadership that began with Uzziah and continued with Jotham disappeared with Ahaz. We wonder why the godly examples of his father and grandfather did Ahaz no good. Historians tell us that Ahaz was coregent with his father for four years, which means he started when he was sixteen. Did Ahaz become proud? Did he listen to wrong counsel?

The Ammonite god Molech was worshiped in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom. The king even put his children on the heathen altar. When a father is disobedient to God, often the children suffer most. King Josiah defiled the place (2 Kings 23:10) and made it a garbage dump. The word *gehenna* came to refer to the place of eternal judgment, hell.

Judah experienced a humiliating defeat from Israel, but God mercifully overruled and rescued the people. It was a prophet, not a king or general, who saved the day.

Instead of repenting and returning to the God of his father and grandfather, Ahaz adopted the gods of the victorious enemy. It seemed logical to him because the enemy was winning! Instead of going by the Word of God, he took the pragmatic approach (Prov. 3:5-6). Have you ever done that? It is dangerous!

2 CHRONICLES 29

When Hezekiah became king, the situation at the temple was not unlike the condition of some churches today (v. 7). Closed doors speak of no access to God and no service for

God. He has set before us an open door (Rev. 3:8), and we close it.

The lamps were out, which indicates no witness (Matt. 5:16), and the incense altar was cold, which signifies that no prayer was going up to God (Ps. 141:2). There were no sacrifices on the altar (Rom. 12:1-2), but there was plenty of rubbish in the temple. No wonder the nation was experiencing the wrath of God instead of the blessing of God.

Hezekiah's formula for revival was simple: sanctification, sacrifice, and song. He started with the priests and Levites, for if God's servants are not clean, God cannot bless their work. Then the priests sanctified the temple, offered the sacrifices, and sang the song of the Lord.

It all happened suddenly (v. 36), but what happened was not new or novel. It was simply a return to the ways of the Lord (Jer. 6:16).

2 CHRONICLES 30

When God's Spirit is at work, Jesus Christ will be glorified, and God's people will be unified. Hezekiah called the whole nation back to the celebration of the Passover, the feast that depicts Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, and many participated with oneness of heart (v. 12). What an occasion of blessing it was!

How tragic that the spiritual leaders were to blame for delaying the event (v. 3). How tragic that some of the people laughed at the invitation (v. 10; Matt. 22:1-14). But how wonderful that God blessed abundantly, healed the people and sent them home rejoicing (vv. 21, 23, 25, 26). The people who turned down the invitation missed a special opportunity.

God looks at the heart and does not permit ceremonial matters to get in the way of His grace (1 Sam. 15:22; Ps. 50:7-15; 51:16-17; Hos. 6:6). Hezekiah saw to it that the people were taught the Word (v. 22) because the Word nourishes the heart and cleanses the life, long after the memories of great events have faded away. The people experienced great joy as a result of sharing in the Passover feast (v. 26). The Jews would have great joy at the dedication of the walls of Jerusalem (Neh. 12:43). Other people who experienced great joy from the Lord are the wise men (Matt. 2:10), the apostles (Luke 24:52), and the

new believers in Samaria (Acts 8:8). The message of the gospel is good news of great joy (Luke 2:10). Are you sharing it with others?

2 CHRONICLES 31

When you come back to walk with the Lord, the evidences of the new life are there to see.

Cleansing. For too long, the worship of Jehovah had taken place alongside the worship of the heathen gods; that would now end. The people assisted the king in destroying the obscene images and pagan altars. After all, the nation had just celebrated Passover, and the week following Passover was to be a time of "housecleaning" (Exod. 12:15-20).

Serving. It is not enough to get rid of the bad; we must also establish and strengthen the good. The king made certain the priests obeyed God's law and ministered at the temple. Had the priests been ministering faithfully to begin with, the nation would not have gone into apostasy.

Giving. If the priests are to serve, the people must support them. One of the first signs of spiritual awakening is the generosity of those whose hearts God has touched. Nobody had to plead or urge; the giving came from the hearts of people who were right with God.

2 CHRONICLES 32

Testings usually come after times of great blessing, and Hezekiah faced three of them.

War. After other times of awakening, the nation was given protection and rest from enemies (2 Chron. 15:15; 20:29-30), but this time, God allowed the enemy to come in. God was testing the faith of the king and the people to see how deep it really was. It is one thing to participate in a huge religious meeting, but quite something else to have your land invaded and your capital city threatened.

Sickness. Hezekiah's illness was both a national and a personal crisis, for he did not have any sons to take the throne. God had promised that David's family would never lack for a man on the throne, so Hezekiah prayed that he might be able to live and have a son.

Honor. Hezekiah weathered the invasion and the illness, but he capitulated to pride. It began when he failed to thank God for sparing his life, and apparently even God's chastening did not cure him. The extent of his wealth and the praises of the visiting dignitaries made Hezekiah proud, and God had to deal with him.

We have learned that if Satan cannot conquer us when he comes as the lion (1 Pet. 5:8), he will come again as the serpent (2 Cor. 11:1-3). You may be in greater danger when things are going well than when you are fighting a battle, so keep alert.

2 CHRONICLES 33

Manasseh rebuilt what his father had torn down and then tore it down again so he could rebuild. (Compare Gen. 26:18.) He did not learn from the past or listen to the prophets, so he had to live with the punishment God sent him. Some people only learn the hard way.

How gracious of God to see Manasseh's repentance, hear his prayer, and restore him to Jerusalem. But even God's forgiveness could not automatically nullify the king's bad example or undo the terrible damage he had done in the land. Sin has consequences long after sinners are forgiven (2 Kings 23:26; 24:3).

God is ready and willing to forgive, and we should seek that forgiveness early. The longer we wait, the more damage we do; the more damage we do, the more we and others will suffer because of our sins.

2 CHRONICLES 34

Find the Book. The greatest treasure you have is not money but the Word of God, which too often is "lost" amid the "rubbish" you can easily accumulate. Do you treasure God's Word? (See Ps. 119:14, 72, 127, 162.) Is it "buried" somewhere?

Read the Book. God's Word is not a relic to admire in a religious museum. They did not put the Book back in its niche in the temple. Rather, they read it publicly and honored it as the living Word of God.

Obey the Book. The king trembled at God's Word (Isa. 66:2) and immediately sent for God's message. There is always a

fresh word from the Lord as you read the Bible and seek His will.

Share the Book. The king gathered the people to the temple to hear God's Word (vv. 29–30). It is good to be a receiver of the Word, but it is also good to be a transmitter and share it with others (1 Thess. 1:6–10).

Stand for the Word. The king and the people made a covenant with the Lord and took their stand publicly. After all, the result of Bible knowledge ought to be obedience and service, a living commitment to the God of the Word.

2 CHRONICLES 35

Remembering the past (1–19). Passover is the great feast of Jewish liberation, when the nation recalls its deliverance from Egypt (Exod. 13:1–10). Following the example of godly Hezekiah (2 Chron. 30), Josiah held a feast and called the people to praise God. As in the days of Hezekiah, the spiritual leaders had to be encouraged to do their jobs. Too often those who should be leading are standing in the way.

Mortgaging the future (20–27). If God defeated Egypt in the days of Moses, surely He could do it again for Josiah! Without seeking the mind of the Lord, Josiah meddled in a war that had nothing to do with Judah, and it led to his death. A disguise is no protection if we have disobeyed God (v. 22; 2 Chron. 18:29). Judah was back in bondage to Egypt!

We wonder what the future of Judah might have been had Josiah heeded the warning God gave him. Strange as it seems, God can speak through messengers who may not even know Him (John 11:49–52).

2 CHRONICLES 36

Second Chronicles opens telling how the temple was built. It closes telling how and why the temple of God was destroyed.

First the enemy *robbed the temple* (vv. 7, 19), taking the treasures of the Lord to their pagan temple in Babylon. You expect an enemy to do this, but you do not expect the priests and people to *defile* their own temple (v. 14)! While Nebuchadnezz-

zar was taking Jerusalem to Babylon, the Jewish leaders were bringing Babylon to Jerusalem! Do we ever learn?

The next step was *death in the temple* (v. 17). God had shown compassion to His people (v. 15), but the enemy showed no compassion at all. The people fled to the temple, hoping for God's protection, but it was too late. The house of prayer had become a den of thieves.

Finally, the temple was *destroyed*, just as Jeremiah had warned (Jer. 25—26). The nation had disobeyed the Word of God in many ways, including ignoring the Sabbatical Years (Lev. 25:1-7; 26:27-35). The only thing left was judgment.

But the book closes with an announcement of the *rebuilding* of the temple, something that Jeremiah also prophesied (29:10). Even in wrath, God remembers mercy (Hab. 3:2).

EZRA and NEHEMIAH



In 606–605 B.C., the Babylonians began their conquest of Jerusalem, deporting many of the people and finally destroying the city and the temple in 587–586 B.C. In 538, Cyrus issued a proclamation allowing the Jews to return to their land and rebuild their temple, and nearly fifty thousand returned under the leadership of Zerubbabel (Ezra 1–6). The seventy years of captivity were ended. In spite of difficulty and delay, the temple was completed in 515.

Ezra the scribe went to Jerusalem in 458 with about two thousand Jews, including some Levites to help in the temple ministry (Ezra 7–10). In 444, Nehemiah, a layman, went to rebuild the walls (Neh. 1–6) and rededicate the people (Neh. 7–13).

Following their restoration to the land, the Jewish nation experienced times of trial and reproach, but the Lord saw them through. The emphasis in Ezra and Nehemiah is on trusting God for a new beginning and doing His work—no matter what obstacles and opposition are encountered. Although the days may be dark, God is there to guide us, protect us, and help us.

EZRA

EZRA 1—2

The book opens with the closing words of 2 Chronicles, for God's plan was not finished. Judah had rejected Jeremiah's warning, but the prophet's words came true. God is at work in human history. His purposes will be accomplished, regardless of the nations' activities. Jeremiah warned of coming judgment, but he also promised restoration; and the promise was fulfilled (Jer. 29:10).

From God's Word to the king's word! Cyrus fulfilled a prophecy given a century and a half before (Isa. 44:28). God can use even a pagan ruler to accomplish His divine purposes. When the words and actions of world leaders disturb you, just remember that God is still on the throne and has things in control.

Not all the Jews of the captivity wanted to return to a desolate land. Some of those who did not go at least encouraged the others and helped with the expenses, as did some of their Babylonian neighbors (1:4, 6).

The trip was difficult, and life in the land was demanding; however, the courageous Jews paid the price to do God's will. No matter how you may have failed in the past, God gives you an opportunity for a new beginning.

EZRA 3

How do you go about restoring things after God's chastening hand has been removed?

Put worship first. There was no temple as yet, but that did not hinder them from setting up an altar and sacrificing to God. This is an illustration of Matthew 6:33. They needed to

worship God for their own sake as well for a witness to the people around them.

Celebrate God's goodness. It was time for the Feast of Tabernacles, a joyful feast of thanksgiving. Times were tough, but the people obeyed the Word and praised the Lord. This in itself would be a testimony to the Gentiles, and it would do their own hearts good. It is always the right time to praise the Lord.

Establish the foundations. The Scriptures told them all they needed to know to rebuild the temple, and they followed God's plan. The foundation is the most important part of the building, for it determines the size, shape, and strength of the structure. Do you have the right foundations for your life?

Look to the future. The old people looked back and wept while the young people looked ahead and rejoiced. Tears and cheers, not too different from what is happening in families and churches today. The men were able to work together but not praise God together. If you concentrate on your past, you are sure to rob yourself of a glorious future (Phil. 3:12-14).

The Future

You cannot change the past, but the past can change you, either for better or for worse. It all depends on how you look at it. The past can be a rudder that guides you or an anchor that hinders you. Leave your past mistakes with God, and look to the future by faith.

EZRA 4

As soon as God starts to bless, the enemy starts to battle. Satan is a destroyer, and he gets angry when God's people unite to build. He has three favorite weapons.

Cooperation (1-3). The people were descendants of the Jews who intermarried with the Gentiles the Assyrians brought to the land (2 Kings 17:24ff.). The "mixed multitude"

would have corrupted the Jews and interfered with the work (Exod. 12:38; Num. 11:4). Beware volunteers; they may be working for the enemy!

Intimidation (4–5). Discouragement and fear are effective weapons, especially when the work is already difficult. When you start to experience fear, lean on Isaiah 12:2.

Legislation (6–24). The people of the world will use “official influence” to hinder God’s work. From their viewpoint, Jerusalem had been a rebellious city, and the king would certainly be concerned about taxes. The tactic worked, and the construction had to stop.

But God was still at work!

“There is no need to fear; if we keep within the moral frontiers of God, we can say boldly, ‘The Lord is my helper.’”

Oswald Chambers

EZRA 5—6

About fifteen years elapse between 4:24 and 5:1. During that time, God prepared two prophets to renew and strengthen the work. After all, God’s Word commenced the project (Ezra 1:1), so only God’s Word could continue it and complete it (Gal. 3:3). When God wants to get something done, He sends His servants with His Word, for nothing but our unbelief can hinder the power of the Word. Even the pagan king had to bow before the Word of God!

When God’s Word is with you and God’s eye is upon you (5:5), your work will prosper (6:14; see also Josh. 1:8; Ps. 1:1–3). Revival comes when God’s people heed God’s Word and do what God tells them to do. Read Haggai’s four sermons of encouragement and rebuke and see what true “revival preaching” is like. Do those messages speak to you now?

The project began with mingled joy and tears (3:8–13), but

it ended with all the people rejoicing (6:16–22). The traditional feast took on new joy because of what God had done for His people.

EZRA 7—8

There is a gap of fifty-seven years between the completion of the temple and the arrival of Ezra. Unfortunately, the people had lapsed into sin; and it was Ezra's task to bring them back to the Lord. One of the emphases in these chapters is *hands*.

God's hand. Ezra was a gifted man (7:10), but he could do nothing unless God's hand was upon him and the people traveling with him. God's hand is a *providing* hand (7:6; 8:18), a *protecting* hand (8:22, 31), an *encouraging* hand (7:28), and a *guiding* hand (7:9).

Ezra's hand (7:14). God's Word was in Ezra's heart as well as his hand (7:10), and it was the Word that the people needed. There can be no cleansing or reviving apart from the Word of God.

A Balanced Life

According to Ezra 7:10, Ezra studied God's Word, obeyed God's Word, and taught God's Word. He was like the person Jesus spoke about in Matthew 13:52: a student (learning) who was a disciple (living) and a householder (sharing). Having a balanced life is most important.

The Jews' hands (8:26, 33). The hands of the people carried the treasures of the Lord, faithfully delivered to the temple at the end of the journey. When you meet the Lord, you will "weigh in" and find out how faithful you have been with what He has given you. Heed the words of 8:29: "Watch and keep!"

EZRA 9

Astonished (1–4). For at least three reasons, the Jewish remnant should have obeyed God's Word about marriage. To begin with, God had been good to bring them back to the land. He had also chastened them in Babylon, and they knew from their own past the consequences of compromise. No wonder Ezra was astonished.

Ashamed (5–9). Ezra used several images to show their plight. They were like drowning men because of their sins (v. 6), and yet they sinned more. They were a little peg on which so much future was hanging (v. 8), a remnant that had to serve as a wall against the awful encroachments of sin (v. 9). If the nation was polluted, how could Messiah be born (v. 2)?

Alarmed (10–15). God had revealed His Word, and they did not obey it. God had shown them grace (v. 8), and they did not appreciate it. God had held back punishment (v. 13; Ps. 103:10), and they took advantage of it. All God could do now was punish them even more.

As he prayed, Ezra trembled (v. 4), knelt (v. 5), and bowed down (v. 6) because nobody could stand before God (v. 15; Ps. 130:3).

EZRA 10

When things look dark, there is always a ray of hope. Shechaniah encouraged the people to confess their sins and obey the Word. He may have been thinking of God's promises in Exodus 34:6–7, Isaiah 55:6–7, and Jeremiah 3:11–13. Believers today turn to 1 John 1:9.

But confession must not be a routine thing that comes only from the lips. We must tremble at God's Word (Ezra 9:4; 10:3; Isa. 66:2) and truly bring Him a broken heart (Ps. 51:16–17). That explains why Ezra fasted and prayed, for he identified himself with the people in their sins. Note the pronouns in Ezra 9:6–15.

Not everybody agreed to obey (v. 15), but those who did submit to Ezra confessed their sins publicly, offered a sacrifice, and put away their pagan wives and children. The experience was painful for them, but it was the only way to keep the nation pure (Matt. 18:7–9). There is no easy way to deal with sin.

Our Hope

God's people have hope because of salvation (Rom. 5:1-2), suffering (Rom. 5:3), the Word of God (Rom. 15:4), and the Spirit of God (Rom. 15:13). Of course, there could be no hope were it not for the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 1:3). He is our Hope (1 Tim. 1:1).

NEHEMIAH

NEHEMIAH 1

Great distress (1–3). Nehemiah enjoyed security and prestige as the king's cupbearer, so there was no reason for him to ask about the needs of people hundreds of miles away. But he loved Jerusalem and was concerned about the welfare of his people (Jer. 15:5). How do you respond when you learn that others are hurting?

A great God (4–9). Nehemiah was a man of prayer; you will find ten of his prayers in this book (1:4ff.; 2:4; 4:4; 5:19; 6:9, 14; 13:14, 22, 29, 31). He believed in a great God (1:5; 4:14; 8:6; 9:32) who kept His promises, forgave sin, and helped His people when they called on Him. Like Ezra before him, Nehemiah identified himself with the sins and sorrows of the nation (Ezra 9:5ff.).

You Can Make the Difference

It was a day of reproach for the people of God (Neh. 1:3; 2:17; 5:9; 6:13). The great city of Jerusalem was no longer beautiful (Ps. 50:2), and the Jews were no longer powerful. But one man made the difference! Nehemiah led the Jews from great reproach (1:3) to great rejoicing (12:43). God is still seeking men and women willing to sacrifice to do His work. Are you available?

Great power (10-11). Nehemiah did more than weep and pray; he made himself available to the Lord to get the job done. He depended on God's great power to work in and through him (Eph. 3:20-21). He was not content merely to *get* answers to prayer; he wanted to *be* an answer to prayer. Has God used you lately to be an answer to somebody's prayers?

NEHEMIAH 2

Waiting. Nehemiah did not suddenly quit his job and hurry to Jerusalem. He prayed and faithfully worked for four months, waiting to approach the king in the Lord's time. Waiting may be much harder than working, but it is dangerous to rush ahead of the Lord.

Praying. Nehemiah's "telegraph prayers" were effective because he spent much time alone with God. The throne of grace in heaven has greater authority than any throne on earth (Eph. 1:15-23). Are you in the habit of talking to God during your daily activities?

Explaining. Nehemiah had been planning his work carefully, so he was able to give the king satisfactory answers. Prayer and concern are not substitutes for clear thinking and adequate organization.

Preparing. Nehemiah paid attention to this advice: "Whoever believes will not act hastily" (Isa. 28:16). Before enlisting the leaders, Nehemiah became personally acquainted with the needs (v. 11; Ezra 8:32). Dedicated leaders are awake when others are asleep, but they see more in the darkness than others do in the light (Prov. 20:18).

NEHEMIAH 3

The workers were involved in building, repairing (the word is used forty times) and fortifying (v. 8), ministries needed in the church today. The walls and gates were important for the protection of the people and the beauty of the city.

There is a place of ministry for everybody who has a mind to work: priests (v. 1), rulers (vv. 12-19), craftsmen (v. 8), and dedicated women (v. 12). God sometimes brings outsiders to help us (vv. 2, 5, 7), and some people are willing to do extra

work (vv. 11, 19, 21). The significant thing is that they cooperated as they served the Lord. But don't be surprised if some people do nothing (v. 5), including some leaders. Just keep on working!

The best place to start working is at your own house (vv. 10, 23, 28). If each of us served the Lord first at home, what a difference it would make in the work of the Lord!

Who Does the Work?

Some people are constructionists, helping to get the job done. Others are destructionists, busy tearing things down. A third group is made up of obstructionists who create problems for the people doing the work. In which group are you?

NEHEMIAH 4

The enemy knows what we are doing and will be quick to fight us. Expect opposition, and be ready for it. Note the different weapons that the enemy used then and still uses today.

Mockery (1-6). The enemy wants you to think that your work is not important, that you are too weak to do it, and that if you finish it, it will not last. In other words, he wants you to believe that it is not worth it all, so you might as well quit. Just keep in mind that it is God's work and therefore a great work (v. 19; 6:3). Keep the greatness of God before your eyes (v. 14; 1:5, 10).

Threats (7-9). If your enemy cannot fool you, he will try to frighten you. The people practiced Ephesians 6:10-18; they armed themselves, prayed, and kept working.

Fear (10-23). The Jews living outside the city came to work with frightening tales about the enemy's plans. Again, the greatness of God helps us overcome the fear of man (v. 14), plus our willingness to stay on the job despite the sacrifices that may be required.

***“Watch
and
Pray!”***

This means trusting God while at the same time being alert to what the enemy is doing. It is the way to be ready for Christ’s return (Mark 13:33) and to be victorious over temptation (Mark 14:38) and Satan (Eph. 6:18). It is also the way to have open doors for ministry and make the most of them (Col. 4:2–6).

NEHEMIAH 5

Now the enemy attacks from inside the nation, and Nehemiah must deal with selfishness and greed among his people. The wealthier Jews took advantage of the famine and economic crisis to exploit their own people (Hag. 1:7–11). How did Nehemiah respond?

Anger (6). There is a righteous anger against sin that itself is not sinful (Eph. 4:26). Although it is difficult not to get angry with people, we must try to focus on what they do rather than who they are. (See Exod. 32:19; Mark 3:5.) A person who lacks anger may also lack conviction and courage.

“It is easy to fly into a passion—anybody can do that—but to be angry with the right person to the right extent and at the right time and with the right object and in the right way—that is not easy, and it is not everyone who can do it.”

Aristotle

Deliberation (7). It was not Nehemiah's practice to exercise leadership without first thinking things through (Prov. 18:13; 29:22). No doubt he also prayed for God's wisdom.

Resolution (7-13). Once he decided what to do, he did it! He appealed to their love ("brother" in v. 7) and their devotion to the Word of God (Exod. 22:25). He reminded them of the fear of God and their witness to the enemy (v. 9).

Example (14-19). Had Nehemiah not been an unselfish and sacrificing man, he could not have appealed as he did (Matt. 7:1-5). He had helped the people generously and did not take advantage of his position as governor. A clear conscience is a mighty weapon in God's hands.

NEHEMIAH 6

As long as God's people sin against one another, the enemy can rest, but as soon as sin has been dealt with, the enemy must attack once more. Here are some more weapons he uses.

Guile (1-4). Beware when the enemy is smiling and holding out his arms to hug you! We must say no to invitations that compromise our witness (2 Cor. 6:14-7:1) and take us away from the great work God has called us to do.

Keep on Course

A true leader will not desert his or her post, but a hireling flees when the going is tough (Prov. 28:1). The enemy tried to get Jesus to flee, but He refused to alter His course (Luke 13:31-33). Paul continued on his course even though he knew that suffering lay before him (Acts 20:22-24; 21:13). We must always flee sin and temptation (Gen. 39:12; 1 Cor. 6:18; 1 Tim. 6:11; 2 Tim. 2:22), but we must not flee the place of duty.

Accusation (5–9). Satan is both a liar and an accuser (Rev. 12:10); he seeks to slander God’s servants (Job 1:6ff.). When you have a clear conscience (Acts 24:16) and you know how to pray, this weapon will fail to frighten you or stop your work.

Fear (10–19). Jesus had His Judas and Nehemiah had his Shemaiah, an informer who tried to frighten Nehemiah. There were also “family informers” opposing the work (vv. 17–19). But Nehemiah was a true shepherd and not a hireling (v. 13; John 10:11–15). He was not going to flee. The work was completed in a record fifty-two days, and God was glorified.

NEHEMIAH 7—8

The city of God. Every ministry and home needs gatekeepers and guards, for after a work is finished, it must be protected from the enemy (2 John 8). We also need leaders with courage and integrity. After all, there is a battle going on!

The people of God. The record of the original returnees helped Nehemiah determine who should become a citizen of Jerusalem, for he did not want any of the “mixed multitude” to come in and cause more trouble. One of the most difficult things in the Christian life is maintaining the purity of the faith and of the fellowship.

The Word of God. When Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem in 444 B.C., Ezra was already there, instructing the people in God’s law. When the work of rebuilding was completed, Ezra held a great “Bible conference” during the Feast of Tabernacles. The emphasis in chapter 8 is on “the Book” (vv. 1, 3, 5, 8, 18). They honored God’s Word by standing when it was opened (v. 5), listening when it was read, and seeking to understand it when it was explained (vv. 2–3, 7–8, 12–13). They rejoiced at understanding the Word (v. 12) and at obeying the Word (v. 17; James 1:25).

NEHEMIAH 9

The Feast of Tabernacles was a time of joy, but when it ended, the people took an extra day for hearing the Word, confessing sin, and worshiping the Lord. This is a balanced ministry: the Word reveals our sin and God’s forgiveness;

confession brings forgiveness; and forgiveness should lead to praise.

The people stood up to hear the Word (8:5), and the choir encouraged them to stand up and praise the Lord (v. 5)! He is the God of creation (v. 6), the God of the covenant (vv. 7–8), and the God of redemption (vv. 9–15). He is long-suffering with His people and meets their needs even when they do not obey His commands (vv. 16–31). The song ended with the people entering into a covenant with the Lord (vv. 32–38).

It is a beautiful summary of God's ministry to Israel. He brought them out (v. 7), brought them through (v. 11), brought them in (v. 23), and saved them from their enemies (v. 27). But what a record of Israel's sins! However, God invites His people to make new beginnings and to let Him bury the past.

NEHEMIAH 10—11

It is one thing to attend a feast, sing praises to God, and hear the Bible read and explained, and quite something else to commit yourself to obey the will of God. The eighty-four men who put their seal to the covenant wanted God and the people to know that they were serious about obedience. These names represented whole families (10:28), so that more people were involved in this solemn commitment than are named in chapter 10.

“Most church members live so far below the standard, you’d have to backslide to be in fellowship. We are so subnormal that if we were to become normal, people would think we were abnormal.”

Vance Havner

Their dedication was public, and it was also specific and included obedience with regard to marriage (10:30), the Sabbath and the Sabbatical year (10:31), their support of the tem-

ple (10:32) and their gifts and sacrifices for the temple ministry (10:33–39). Their dedication was costly, but it was worthy of all that God had done for them. When we are right with God, we will support His work and His house: “We will not neglect the house of our God” (10:39).

NEHEMIAH 12

Completion. Any work that we do for God succeeds only because of His working in us (Phil. 2:12–13). Therefore, that work must be dedicated to Him for His glory. Otherwise, we may become proud, and the work then becomes an idol that takes God’s rightful place in our lives (Deut. 8:11–20).

Celebration. The emphasis is on joy and thanksgiving to God. The work was finished, the enemy was humiliated, and the Lord was glorified; so why not rejoice? Nehemiah and Ezra each led one of the two choirs as they sang their way around the city walls and met at the temple area. The sound of the joy “was heard afar off” (v. 43; Ezra 3:12–13).

Cleansing. Of what value is a dedicated wall without dedicated people? Verse 30 parallels Isaiah 1:16 and 2 Corinthians 7:1. A singing people should be a sanctified people.

NEHEMIAH 13

After the big celebration, then what? The work of a spiritual leader is never finished, for the enemy never quits. How sad it is to read that during Nehemiah’s absence from the city, the Jews gradually stopped keeping the covenant they had made with God (10:28–39). By the time Nehemiah returned, the people were terribly backslidden.

Separation. The people had mixed with the pagans, the priest had let the enemy into the temple, and Jewish parents were allowing their children to marry pagan mates (vv. 23–27). The walls of the city were still strong, but the spiritual walls of separation were crumbling.

Stewardship. The people had promised to support the temple ministry but had not been faithful to bring the required tithes and offerings. Decreased giving is often a sign of diminished spiritual vitality.

Sacrifice. God gave them six days for work and business

and asked for only one day for Himself, but some people robbed Him of that (vv. 15-22). They were actually robbing themselves of blessing and of the opportunity to witness to the pagans around them.

Nehemiah was resolute, and the secret of his courage was prayer (vv. 14, 22, 29, 31). Are you willing to be different from others to the glory of God?

◆ —————

***A Worthy
Role Model***

Nehemiah was a layman who loved Jerusalem and the temple and wanted the city to glorify God. He is a good example for all of us to follow in his devotion to duty, his discipline in planning and doing his work, his dedication to the Word of God, and his dependence on prayer. He did not use his authority selfishly but humbly and sacrificially served God and the people. He did not run from difficulties or dangers but trusted God to help him face them honestly and solve them successfully.

◆ —————

ESTHER

Esther and Ruth are the only books in the Bible named after women. Ruth was a Gentile who married a Jew, while Esther was a Jewess who married a Gentile. Both were women of faith and courage; both helped to save the nation of Israel, Ruth by the birth of a son and Esther by the death of an enemy.

The Persians conquered Babylon in 539 B.C. The events in the book of Esther occurred at Susa (Shushan; Esther 1:2; see also Neh. 1:1), where the king's winter palace was located, and they belong between chapters 6 and 7 of Ezra. The king who married Esther was Xerxes I (the name Ahasuerus was a title, like Pharaoh); the events in the book cover about ten years, from his third year (1:3) to his twelfth year (3:7).

The name of God is not mentioned in this book, but the hand of God is seen throughout the account. A primary lesson is that God is sovereign in the nations of the world, and His people must surrender and do His will. The Jews who were struggling in Jerusalem and Judah needed the encouragement of this book and the reminder that God keeps His covenant promises (Gen. 12:1-3).

ESTHER 1

A man is very poor if he can show *all* his glory and wealth in six months! It will take eternal ages for us to begin to fathom the riches of God's grace and glory (Eph. 1:18). Where is the glory of Xerxes today?

A man is poor if he must entertain his guests with "wine in abundance" (v. 7). What began as a royal banquet degenerated into a drunken party (Prov. 20:1; 23:29-31). Queen Vashti

was wise to refuse to attend such a feast (Prov. 23:20). She lost her crown, but she kept her integrity.

A man is poor if he lets his temper get the best of him (Prov. 14:17; 16:32). Xerxes made some foolish decisions, which is what usually happens when anger takes over. But God was in control, working out His plan even through a proud pagan monarch (Prov. 21:1).

ESTHER 2

The selection of Esther (vv. 1–18) and the detection of the plotters (vv. 19–23) may seem to be events that do not belong together, but they were both part of God's plan to save His people. Esther's coronation was a grand public affair, while Mordecai's service to the king was rather private. But God would use Esther's position and Mordecai's service to fulfill His purposes.

You may be prone to believe that God works only in the "important events" of life. All events are important if you are living in the will of God. Mordecai was not immediately rewarded for saving the king's life, but God would take care of it at the right time (chap. 6). Do your duty today, and let God take care of the consequences.

ESTHER 3

The king promoted an evil man and approved a wicked project. No doubt many of the Jews were asking, "Why has God permitted such a thing?" The fact that God permits evil in this world does not mean that evil is good or that God is unconcerned or unable to help. When men do not allow Him to rule, He overrules, and He always accomplishes His purposes.

No matter how you examine Haman, he is a wicked man. Promote him and he gets proud. Ignore him and he becomes angry and takes out his anger on a whole race. (Prejudice usually works that way.) Make him rich and he uses his money to destroy and not to build.

Everything about Haman was hateful to the Lord (Prov. 6:16–19), but He did not interfere with Haman's evil deeds. Ha-

man's sins would ultimately destroy him and be used by God for the good of Israel.

Prejudice

"Prejudice is the dislike for all that is unlike," said Israel Zangwill, author and Zionist leader. When Haman said that the Jews were a different people (3:8), he was right, and that difference meant salvation for the world. Mark Twain called anti-Semitism "the swollen envy of pigmy minds." From Pharaoh to Hitler, every leader who has tried to destroy the Jews has tasted the wrath of God. No race is perfect, including the Jews, but no race should be singled out for oppression as they have been. God's covenant with Abraham still stands (Gen. 12:1-3).

ESTHER 4

An irrepressible grief. A crisis does not make a person; it shows what a person is made of. In spite of the danger involved, Mordecai publicly displayed his grief and let people know his position. He would not stand by and do nothing when the authorities were about to slaughter innocent people, including children.

An inaccessible king. Oriental monarchs were supposed to hear only good news; they reigned in a world of illusion, sheltered from reality. Even the queen had to have permission to talk to him! How different it is with the King of kings. He has worn the sackcloth of sorrow, He knows how we feel, and He gives us free access to His throne (Heb. 10:19-22).

An incomparable opportunity. God uses people to accom-

plish His purposes, and Esther was God's prepared servant for that hour (v. 14; Eph. 2:10). God accomplishes His purposes even if we disobey His call, *but we are the losers*. Mordecai did not want Esther's gifts; he wanted her life surrendered to the Lord. She became a living sacrifice to accomplish the work of God (Rom. 12:1).

ESTHER 5

Sometimes it takes a crisis to remind us that we never serve the Lord alone. Esther enjoyed comfort and ease in the palace, but now she had a difficult task to perform. Her people were fasting and seeking God's help for her; she could not have succeeded alone.

Poor Haman was basking in false glory, boasting about false wealth, enjoying false happiness, and resting on false confidence. He did not realize that the shadow of death was over him. But is he much different from the proud unbelievers of this day who build their lives on illusions?

Esther sensed that this was not the right time to reveal her nationality. The delay of one day gave Haman opportunity to have the gallows built on which he would be hanged. Promoted by the king, honored by the queen, and advised by his wife, Haman appears to have all his problems solved! But read Psalm 37.

ESTHER 6

Providence. If any chapter in the book of Esther reveals the providence of God, it is this one. (*Providence* [pro, "before"; video, "to see"] means "to see beforehand.") God kept the king awake, led the reader to the record about Mordecai, and had Haman arrive at just the right time. All of that happened behind the scenes, so Esther, Mordecai, and the Jews did not know about it. God is working on your behalf today, so trust Him (Rom. 8:28).

Conceit. Haman hated Mordecai so much that he got up very early to ask for his enemy's death. And Haman loved Haman so much that he could not imagine the king honoring anyone but himself! The proud man has a mirror in which he

sees himself; the humble man has a window through which he sees others (Rom. 12:10; Phil. 2:3-4). Haman's pride destroyed him (Prov. 16:18; 18:12).

Disgrace. What a humiliating experience! Haman had to dress Mordecai in the robes he wanted to wear, put him on the horse he wanted to ride, and then lead him—a Jew—through the busiest part of the city! That should have been a warning to Haman that his plot would fail, and his wife's words only confirmed it. Had he heeded the warning and humbled himself, his life would have been spared, but pride does not easily give in to truth.

“Humility is the source of all true greatness: pride is ever impatient, ready to be offended. He who thinks nothing is due to him, never thinks himself ill-treated.”

Fenelon

ESTHER 7

The wise person knows *what* to say and *how* and *when* to say it (Prov. 15:28; 16:23). In her brief reply to the king's question, Esther revealed her nationality (Esther 2:10, 20), her danger, and the presence of an enemy in the palace. She gave no names but waited to see the reaction of the king. God gives us the wisdom we need when we need it (James 1:5).

What a blow to the king's pride to learn that the man he had promoted and honored was only a self-seeking traitor. “As messengers of death is the king's wrath” (Prov. 16:14). Haman took Mordecai's place on the gallows, and the king's anger was appeased: “The righteous is delivered from trouble, and it comes to the wicked instead” (Prov. 11:8).

Beware if you are digging a pit for an enemy; you may fall in it yourself (Ps. 7:14-16). An enemy is a costly thing, a luxury that is too expensive to maintain.

◆

***The
Prosperity
of the
Wicked***

Today it seems that the wicked are prospering and the righteous are suffering, but one day that will change (Prov. 11:8). Pharaoh had the Jewish boy babies drowned and God drowned his army in the Red Sea (Exod. 14:19ff.). Daniel was delivered from the lions' den, and the people who falsely accused him took his place and were slain (Dan. 6). Peter was delivered from prison, and his guards were executed (Acts 12). King Herod killed James and was slain by God (Acts 12). Read and ponder Psalm 73.

◆

ESTHER 8

Esther had exposed the enemy and saved her own life, but what about her people? The king himself could not revoke his edict, but he could issue another edict. He gave the Jews the right to arm and protect themselves and gave them nine months to get ready. The people of the land got the message: the king did not want the Jews to be harmed.

Can you see here an illustration of how God solved the sinner's plight? You were under condemnation because of the law of sin and death (Rom. 3:23; 6:23). God did not revoke that law—He *obeyed* it! He sent His Son to die for our sins and to bring in “the law of the Spirit of life” (Rom. 8:2). Any sinner who believes the message and trusts the Savior will receive everlasting life (John 3:15–16).

But that is not the end. We are the King's couriers, sent into the world by His authority to share the good news that *condemned sinners need not die!* Just as those couriers “hastened and pressed on by the king's command” (v. 14), so we must get

the gospel to the ends of the earth as quickly as possible. After all, people will perish unless we tell them the good news!

ESTHER 9—10

We discover that the Jews had many enemies throughout the king's provinces. Had Haman's plan succeeded, the nation would have been annihilated. We are not told how these enemies had been persecuting God's people, but their day of reckoning finally came. God kept His covenant promise to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3).

It is a good thing to set aside days for special remembrance and celebration. We need to remind ourselves of what the Lord has done and show our gratitude to Him. The Feast of Purim (*pur* means "lots" [3:7; 9:26]) is a time of great gladness and feasting. (See Ps. 30.)

God turned defeat into victory (9:1-3) and sorrow into joy (9:22). Of course, God does not write a "happy ending" on *earth* for every life story. Some of God's choicest saints have had to suffer and even die for the faith (Heb. 11:36-40). But God still writes that last chapter, even if it looks to us like failure. Ponder Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 4:7-18, and look forward with joy to the future God has planned for you (1 Cor. 2:9-10).

Trust in Him

"Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God," said Corrie ten Boom. And Dr. Bob Jones, Sr., advised, "Never doubt in the darkness what God has told you in the light."

JOB

Most of this book is poetry, but it is not fiction. Job was a real person in a real place who suffered real trials (Ezek. 14:14–20). James points to Job as an example of endurance, which means faithfulness under trial (James 5:11). Job did get impatient with himself, his circumstances, and his friends, but he did not turn away from his faith in God.

The book describes three encounters: Job and Satan (chaps. 1–2), Job and his friends (chaps. 3–37), and Job and the Lord (chaps. 38–42). His friends did their best to convince Job he was suffering because he was a sinner, but Job refused to compromise his integrity. In spite of some rash statements, Job spoke the truth, but his friends did not (Job 42:7).

It is usually said that the book of Job deals with this question: “Why do the godly suffer?” Actually, the theme goes deeper than that. Satan accused Job of serving God *only because God blessed him*. Unfortunately, there are still people like that, people with “commercial faith” who say to God, “If you bless me, I will serve You!” (See Satan’s temptation of Christ in Matt. 4:8–10.)

The basic question is not “Why do the righteous suffer?” (there are many answers to that question) but “Is our God worthy of our worship and service, or must He ‘buy’ us with His blessings?” Satan was not only slandering Job; he was also slandering the Lord! He was saying, “God would not have any followers if He did not reward them!”

As you read, note the many images used by the speakers. These similes and metaphors help us see ourselves, the world of nature, life and death and, most of all, almighty God. (God is called “Almighty” thirty-one times in Job.) Job suffered so that you and I might learn some valuable lessons about what it really means to trust the Lord.

JOB 1

Job knew nothing about Satan's challenge to God and had no idea that the enemy was using him as a reason for slandering the Lord. Neither did Job know that God would use his sufferings to defeat Satan. God's people are soldiers on the battlefield, but there are times when they *are* the battlefield!

If you obey God only because He blesses you, the shallowness of your faith will show up in the testing time (Matt. 7:24-27; 13:20-21). Faith that cannot be tested cannot be trusted (James 1:1-8; 1 Pet. 1:3-9).

When Satan accuses you before God (or to yourself), remember that Jesus Christ is your defending Advocate in heaven; turn your case over to Him (Zech. 3; Rom. 8:31-39; 1 John 2:1-2; Rev. 12:10).

Satan

***Origin.** Satan is a rebellious angel who was judged by God and fell from holiness to wickedness (Isa. 14:12-15). The angels who fell with him make up his army of spirits opposed to God and God's people (Eph. 6:10-13; Luke 11:18). Because Satan is a created being, he is not equal to God; though he possesses tremendous wisdom and power, Satan is always subject to God's will.*

***Nature.** He is a liar and murderer (John 8:44); an adversary (1 Pet. 5:8-9); the god of this age (2 Cor. 4:4); the ruler of this world (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 1 John 5:19); a deceiver (2 Cor. 11:3); a destroyer (Rev. 9:11; Abaddon means "destruction"); and a counterfeiter of God (Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43; 2 Cor. 11:13-*

15). *The word Satan means "adversary," and devil means "slanderer, accuser" (Zech. 3:1-5).*

Works. *Satan can seek to deceive your mind (Gen. 3:1ff.; Matt. 16:21-23; 2 Cor. 11:3); snatch away God's Word (Matt. 13:19); attack your body (Job 2: 4-7; 2 Cor. 12:7); control your will (1 Chron. 21:1ff.; 2 Tim. 2:26); destroy your possessions (Job 1:13ff.); hinder your work for the Lord (1 Thess. 2:18); make you proud (1 Tim. 3:6-7); cause persecution (Rev. 2:10); and tempt you to sin (Matt. 4:1ff.). When you have sinned, he can accuse you and discourage you (2 Cor. 2:6-11). You must claim God's forgiveness by faith (1 John 1:9).*

Defeat. *In His life, death, resurrection, and ascension, Christ defeated Satan and his evil hosts (John 12:31-33; Eph. 1: 15-2:10; Col. 2:13-15). God's people must recognize the devil and know when he is at work (2 Cor. 2:11); respect him, because he is powerful and subtle (1 Pet. 5:8); and resist him with the Word of God and prayer (Matt. 4:1-11; James 4:7; Eph. 6:17-18). The believer must wear the whole armor of God (Eph. 6:10ff.) and use the spiritual equipment. There is overcoming power in the blood of Christ (Rev. 12:11) and the power of the Spirit (1 John 4:4).*

"Nor give place to the devil" (Eph. 4:27). In Ephesians 4:17-32, Paul names some sins that can give Satan a foothold in your life: lust, lying, anger, stealing, corrupt speech, evil speaking, an unforgiving spirit, bitterness, malice, and so forth. Any sinful thing that belonged to your old life can be used by the devil to ruin your new life, so be sure to keep your heart clean before the Lord.

***Future.** Satan still has access to heaven (Job 1-2; Zech. 3) but one day will be thrown out (Rev. 12:7-12). When the Lord Jesus comes to establish His kingdom, He will cast Satan into hell, the lake of fire, where he will be tormented forever (Rev. 19:11-20:3). Hell was prepared for Satan and his angels, but people who reject Christ and believe Satan's lies will suffer in hell with him (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:11-15).*

JOB 2

Satan's prediction about Job was wrong, which shows that he cannot foresee the future as God can. Instead of hearing Job say, "Cursed be the name of the Lord!" Satan heard, "Blessed be the name of the Lord!" Job had lost his wealth and his children, yet he did not blame God. (See James 1:2-12; 1 Pet. 1:3-9.)

Satan never gives up (Luke 4:13). He suggested to God a new test for Job: personal physical suffering (2 Cor. 12:1-10). Pain can weaken our resistance and make everything feel and look worse than it really is. More than one person who

has victoriously survived tragedy has fallen apart under the onslaughts of pain.

◆

**God
Will
Provide**

Are health and wealth necessarily marks of God's blessing? Are sickness and poverty proof that we are out of God's will? To the Old Testament Jew, the answer would be yes to both questions. God promised to bless Israel physically and materially if they obeyed His law (Deut. 28). The nation of Israel was like a little child that had to be taught by means of rewards and punishments. But these old covenant blessings are not guaranteed to God's people under the new covenant today. With the coming of Jesus Christ to earth, the "childhood" period of Israel's history ended (Gal. 4:1-7). Our Lord was poor, and so were the apostles and many of the great men and women of faith (2 Cor. 8:9; 6:4-10; Heb. 11:36-40). Paul lived with a physical affliction (2 Cor. 12:7-10), and one of his most beloved workers almost died from illness (Phil. 2:25-30; see also 2 Tim. 4:20). It is the wicked who seem to be prospering today, not the righteous, but one day, God will turn things around (Ps. 73). God has promised to meet your needs (Matt. 6:25-34; Phil. 4:19), so stop fretting and trust Him to provide.

What kept Job going? His faith in God and his personal integrity. God had no cause to inflict pain on Job (v. 3), and Job knew that he was right in his relationship with God (Job 23:10-12; 27:1-6). God would use Job to refute the explanation of his friends, to silence the accusation of the devil, and to strengthen the determination of all who will suffer in the will of God. If today you are perplexed about something in your life, wait on the Lord and let Him work out His hidden purposes.

JOB 3

Job did not curse God, but he did curse the night of his conception and the day of his birth. The prophet Jeremiah did the same thing one dismal day (Jer. 20:14-18). When you hurt, physically and emotionally, you are prone to lose perspective and forget the joys of the past. Times of suffering can be times of remembering God's goodness and thanking Him for all you have received from His hand. Ponder Psalm 77.

Job asks the question "Why?" seven times in this monologue (vv. 11, 12, 16, 20, 23). "Why?" is an easy question to ask but a very difficult one to answer. Suppose God had told Job the reasons behind his troubles. Would that have solved his problems? After all, God's people live on promises, not on explanations.

A Spiritual Diet

According to Job 3:24, Job was "feeding" on his grief and could not eat. Some people feed on their tears (Ps. 42:3), and others feed on their sins (Job 20:12-19). How much better to feed on God's Word (Jer. 15:16; Matt. 4:4), His will (John 4:34), and His faithfulness (Ps. 37:3).

It is too bad that Job's three friends listened to Job's words instead of to his *feelings*. They decided to tell Job why he was

suffering, but they only made his situation worse. Suffering people need love, acceptance, and patient encouragement, not arguments and accusations.

JOB 4—5

The three friends sincerely meant to console Job, but they ended up condemning him and taking Satan's place! Why? Because each of them saw Job's plight from his own narrow perspective and failed to identify with Job's perplexity and pain. We all need to obey Romans 12:9–16.

Eliphaz asked Job why he did not practice what he preached (4:1–6), a fine way to start encouraging a hurting friend! He told Job that sinners always reap what they sow (4:7–11), suggesting that it was Job's fault that he was now poor and sick instead of being rich and healthy. What encouragement!

Then Eliphaz shared his "experience with God" (4:12–21) on which he based his whole interpretation of life. Avoid those who make *their* experience the only test of truth. The Word of God does not change, but experiences do. We are all different, and God deals with each of us in ways suitable to our needs, our natures and our level of maturity.

Eliphaz closed his speech by telling Job to seek God and submit (5:8), and to accept His correction (5:17); then God would bless him again. But his suggestion played right into Satan's hands: "Does Job fear God for nothing?" (1:9). Eliphaz had the same theology as the devil and did not know it!

If you want to help others, listen with your heart as well as your ears; try not to make your experience the only test of truth. We all "know in part" (1 Cor. 13:9).

JOB 6—7

Job admits that his words were rash (6:3), and he explains why: his grief was a burden that his friends did not feel or try to help him carry. God was shooting poisoned arrows at Job, and his friends were not applying medicine to his painful wounds. One day God will change our burdens into glory (2 Cor. 4:16–18), but until then, we must bear one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2) and relieve one another's wounds (Luke 10:25–37; Acts 16:33).

The friends were like desert brooks that dry up when they are most needed. The thirsty travelers hope for refreshment, but they are disappointed (6:14–23). Do you disappoint hurting people by being critical and failing to care?

In chapter 7, Job talks to God about the seeming futility of his life. Why should God keep him alive? What is all this suffering accomplishing? Job is like a weary hired man who gets no wages (7:1–5). His life rushes by like the shuttle on a loom; it is like a breath and a cloud (7:6–10; James 4:13–17). Job is a target (6:4; 7:20), but what is God aiming at?

“If I am a great sinner,” says Job, “then either pardon my sins or take my life. Either way, I will find some peace.” (See 6:9–10; 7:15, 20–21.) It seems a logical argument, but God’s thoughts are not our thoughts; what seems meaningless to us is reasonable to God (Isa. 55:8–9). We must walk by faith.

Hurting people need encouragement, not argument. Ask God to make your words like healing medicine (Prov. 12:18) and refreshing water (Prov. 18:4). Start the day praying for wisdom to say the right things at the right times (Isa. 50:4).

JOB 8

Theology (1–7). Eliphaz emphasized the sinfulness of man, and Bildad majored on the justice of God. Both men were right in their doctrine but wrong in their conclusion. They locked God into a formula and refused to let Him exercise His freedom to do what He wants to do. Before the book ends, Job and his friends will discover that God is much greater than the words they used in speaking about Him. Have you limited God? Do you know the living God or only theological words?

History (8–10). Bildad was a devoted traditionalist who called his witnesses from the past. There is nothing wrong with our learning from the past, provided it does not turn the present into a museum and the future into a cemetery. Someone has said, “Tradition is the living face of dead people, while traditionalism is the dead face of living people.” Is the past encouraging you or embalming you?

Science (11–22). Bildad argues from nature: for every effect, there is a cause. If Job is suffering, there must be a cause, and since God is just, that cause has to be Job’s sin. But God’s dealings with His people cannot be studied in a laboratory.

Science has its place, but it cannot explain God. He is too great for man's feeble instruments.

JOB 9—10

Job accepted Bildad's affirmation that God is just, but doing that did not solve his problem. "I am blameless," he said (9:21); "therefore, why should God condemn me?" Job then shared three complaints.

"I cannot contend with Him" (9:1–13). God is so much greater and stronger than we are, who would dare to declare war on Him? God is wise and powerful; we are ignorant and weak.

"I cannot answer Him" (9:14–35). If God and Job went to court, Job would not have an argument to present. God is the Judge, He has all power, and nobody can contend with Him. Meanwhile, life goes by swiftly, like a fast runner, a ship and an eagle. For Job to put on a smiling face (v. 27) will not change his circumstances. It would be hypocrisy.

"I cannot understand Him" (10:1–22). God made Job, and He seems to be destroying His own work. Why was Job born to begin with? God could have saved Himself a lot of trouble!

The answer to these complaints is in 9:33—a mediator, someone who could bring Job and God together. You have that Mediator in Jesus Christ, God's Son (1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 12:24). As both God and man, Jesus understands your needs and can do something about them. Are you complaining—or trusting Him?

JOB 11

Job has heard two points of the sermon from his friends: man is sinful (Eliphaz), and God is just (Bildad). Zophar now finishes the sermon with the third point: God punishes sin and gives less than we really deserve (v. 6). "Things could be worse!" is a cruel statement to make to somebody who has lost everything.

People in pain think that their suffering is worse than anybody else's, so do not argue with them. Zophar responded to Job's words, not his feelings, and that was a mistake. He told Job to repent and seek God, promising that God would hear

him. He warned Job that if he did not repent, he would die (v. 20).

You cannot measure pain or the greatness of God (vv. 7–9). These are dead-end streets. Instead, *lose yourself in the measureless love and power of God* (Eph. 3:14–21). God is not found at the end of an argument, but He is near to those who call on Him.

JOB 12—14

“My life” (12). Job replied to all three friends and reminded them that *he* had wisdom as well as they. In fact, all creation knew the things that they said to him. God is great: His hand made everything (v. 6), and His hand keeps everything alive (v. 10). Job wanted to die and escape his suffering, but God held his life in His hand (Acts 17:24–28; Col. 1:16–17). If your life is in God’s hand, have you anything to fear?

What About Suicide?

The life of every living thing is in God’s hand (Job 12:10). He has numbered our days (Job 14:5) and set a limit beyond which we cannot go (Ps. 139:16). But can we determine a limit sooner than He planned? Is suicide permissible? Job’s wife counseled her husband to curse God and thereby invite His judgment, but Job rejected that suggestion as foolish (Job 2:9–10). Job wanted to die (Job 6:8–10; 7:15–16) but did not assume that he had the right to take his own life. Our lives are in God’s hand, and our times are in His hand (Ps. 31:15). There is no incident in the Bible of a godly person committing suicide. Saul had rebelled against God (1 Sam. 31:3–5); Ahithophel had

turned against the king (2 Sam. 17:23); Zimri was a rebel and a conspirator (1 Kings 16:8–20); and Judas betrayed the Lord (Matt. 27:4–5). Samson’s death (Judg. 16:23ff.) appears to be more martyrdom than suicide. The sixth commandment forbids murder (Exod. 20:13). Man is made in the image of God, and we have no right to attack that image, even if we are suffering greatly. In the Bible, men like Moses, Elijah, and Jonah became discouraged and wanted to die, but they did not attempt to take their own lives. “To run away from trouble is a form of cowardice,” wrote Aristotle, “and while it is true that the suicide braves death, he does it not for some noble object but to escape some ill.” Ponder 2 Timothy 4:6–8.

♦ —————

“My faith” (13). In the previous chapter, Job saw God as Creator, but now he sees Him as Judge. “I desire to reason with God” (v. 3) means “I want to meet Him in court.” Job would rather meet a just God than “worthless physicians” like his friends. When you seek to help others, keep in mind that you are a witness and not a prosecuting attorney. Even if God did condemn him, Job would still trust Him (v. 15). What faith!

“My hope” (14). Like a flower, man is born to die. He disappears like a shadow (v. 2) or like evaporating water (v. 11). Man’s days are numbered (vv. 5–6), but does he have a future? Even a tree will grow again after it is cut down (v. 7), but what about man? The truth about resurrection was not fully revealed in Old Testament days, but Job still rested his hope on God. God has revealed the blessed hope that His people have because of faith in Jesus Christ (John 11:25–26; 1 Cor. 15; 2 Tim. 1:9–10).

“In spite of my sufferings,” said Job, “my life, my faith, and my hope are in God.” Is that your testimony?

JOB 15

The wise man (1–13). Eliphaz thought himself a wise man, so he rebuked Job for his sins. For one thing, Job’s words were so much “hot air” and revealed that he had no fear of God. Job claimed to be wise but was really surpassed in that virtue by his three friends, all of whom were older than he. (Is age a guarantee of wisdom?) Most of all, Job had refused the “consolations” God had sent him through his friends (v. 11). If the words of the three men were “gentle,” what would their harsh words be like! How difficult it is for us accurately to hear ourselves or see ourselves.

The wicked man (14–35). Eliphaz painted this picture of Job. All of us are born in sin (vv. 14–16; Rom. 3:9–23), but some sinners are worse than others. Eliphaz described the fate of the wicked: pain, fear, dreadful noises, hunger, poverty, darkness, and then death. Eliphaz did not explain why the ungodly seem to prosper in this world while the godly often suffer. His theology was “cut and dried.” He had an answer for everything, but he had no help for Job.

JOB 16—17

No comfort (16:1–8). Job’s three friends were indeed “miserable comforters.” They only added to his pain. If the situation were reversed, Job would have spoken words of strength and help to them in their suffering. Their words wore him out and made him shrivel up, as when a desert wind blows. Does God use your words to bring new life to others (Prov. 15:4)?

No defense (16:9–22). Job told what God did to him. God was an adversary against whom Job had no defense. God permitted the people in Job’s life to gape at him, shoot at him, and scorn him. Job was in a battle! If only he had a mediator who could represent him in heaven and bring justice (vv. 18–22)! (See Job 9:33.)

No hope (17:1–16). Job had expressed hope that God would vindicate him even after death (14:14), but his hope was almost

gone (v. 15; 6:11; 7:6; 14:19). All he saw in his future was a decaying body, death, and the grave (vv. 1, 13). Once again, Job cried out for a representative before God (v. 3), somebody who would put up security for him ("shake hands") and get his case settled.

Jesus Christ is Advocate and Mediator for His people and their hope (1 Tim. 1:1). He gave His own blood as security (Heb. 9:12ff.), and those who trust Him always have living hope (1 Pet. 1:3ff.).

JOB 18

Since Job brought up the matter of death and the grave, Bildad decided to elaborate on the subject. He painted some vivid pictures of the death of the wicked.

It is like a light put out (5–6). For the lost sinner, death does indeed mean darkness, but not for those who have faith in Christ (Prov. 4:18). Believers go to heaven where there is no darkness (Rev. 21:25); unbelievers go to hell where there is no light (Matt. 22:13).

It is like an animal trapped (7–10). The wicked man tries to run away, but the path is filled with devices to catch him. Bildad named six different kinds of traps—but it takes only one. There is no escape when your time comes.

It is like a criminal pursued (11–14). As he tries to escape "the king of terrors," the criminal runs, falls down, gets weary, and finally is caught. (See Heb. 9:27.)

It is like a tree rooted up (15–21). The tree seemed strong and solid, but the roots were already dry and death could easily pull the tree up. People even forget that the tree was once there!

This is the death of the wicked, not the death of the righteous. For those who trust Jesus Christ, death means "to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:1–8). Is that your confidence?

JOB 19

Wronged by his comforters (1–4). Their harsh words tormented him, broke him, and reproached him. Why should

they go on? After all, it was not *their* sin that God was punishing, but *his* sin, and they were only making matters worse.

Wronged by God (5–12). Why should one sinner receive so much punishment? Bildad's description of death (chap. 18) was Job's description of his life (vv. 7–12)! He was a "living dead man," and his hope was gone.

Wronged by his family and friends (13–22). Those closest to him stayed farthest from him, and those who should have shown him respect only mocked him. Job was a lonely man crying out for pity, but nobody answered. Ask God to help you be sensitive to the cries of those who hurt, no matter what others may do.

Job still had faith in God (vv. 25–27)! If he died, he would see God, and one day, he would have a new body from God. This promise gives great confidence to God's people (John 11:25–26; 1 Cor. 15:50–58).

They Had Faith

Job 19:25–27 is one of the great declarations of faith found in the Bible. Other important statements of faith were made by Ruth (Ruth 1:16–17), Jeremiah (Lam. 3:22–24), the three Hebrew men (Dan. 3:16–18), Habakkuk (Hab. 3:17–19), a Roman centurion (Matt. 8:5–13), a Canaanite mother (Matt. 15:21–28), Peter (Matt. 16:13–20), and Paul (Acts 20:24).

JOB 20

Zophar's speech is an echo of Bildad's (chap. 18) as he describes the fate of the wicked man. The speech did not apply to Job, but it should be taken to heart by self-confident, successful people who leave God out of their lives.

Success is temporary (1–11). No matter how rich, famous,

or secure he may be, the wicked person will eventually perish. Zophar used graphic images: he will go away like refuse (v. 7, human excrement) or like a dream or night vision (v. 8). Here today, gone tomorrow! Ponder James 4:13–17 and 1 John 2:17.

Life is bitter (12–19). Dainty food becomes poison and wealth makes him sick. The things he thought he would enjoy only bring pain to him. Riches without God can never give anyone true enjoyment (1 Tim. 6:1–10).

Life is painful (20–29). He has no peace because everybody has declared war on him, including God, who rains judgment on him. Arrows (note 6:4), terrors, darkness, and fire are his lot, and then—the end.

Zophar tried to frighten Job into confessing his sins and “getting right with God,” but his approach did not work. The fear of God is a legitimate motive for obedience (Matt. 10:28), but it is not the only motive and it must be tempered by love (2 Cor. 5:10–11, 14).

JOB 21

Bildad and Zophar tried to use logic to silence Job, and their reasoning went like this: (a) God blesses the righteous but makes the wicked suffer; (b) Job is suffering; (c) therefore, Job is wicked. How reasonable!

But Job questioned their basic premise. He had often seen the wicked enjoying great blessing: long life, many descendants, peace and safety, riches, success, and days filled with joy. Yes, the wicked die, but even their death is often quick and easy (Ps. 73:1–14).

Job’s friends were looking at the *outside* of things and ignoring the heart (John 7:24). The test of godly character is not success but *what people think about God* (vv. 14–15). The ungodly ask, “What will we get out of it if we obey God?” But that is Satan’s approach (Job 1:6–11) *and the three friends agreed with him!*

If comfort and wealth are evidences of holiness, our Lord was not holy, for He had little earthly comfort and wealth, and He died a terrible death on the cross. Perhaps you need to examine your own “logic” and see if you are thinking like God or like the devil (Ps. 1:1; Matt. 16:21–28).

It's an Illusion

Now we can better understand why the three friends were so hard on Job: they were afraid that trials might come to them as they did to Job. They protected themselves with a false theology that was born in the pit of hell: "If we obey God, He will bless us and protect us from suffering." Job detected their fear (6:21) and refuted their reasoning, which made them angry. The three friends had a very shallow view of God and of faith and life, while Job penetrated the deep things of God. People who trust a false theology are living a life of illusion that one day will vanish.

JOB 22

Satan and Job's friends all agreed that Job was a sinner at heart and that he obeyed God only because God blessed him. The fact that Job still trusted God after losing his children and his wealth should have proved to them that his faith was not "commercial."

Eliphaz then took a new approach, asking whether Job's righteousness *did God any good*. (Compare v. 2 with Job 21:15.) God is just and does what is right; therefore, He is not influenced by man's good deeds. Eliphaz then named sins that Job must have committed (vv. 4-11), sins Job thought God could not see (vv. 12-20), sins God would forgive if Job would only repent (vv. 21-30). It was the same argument in a new dress, and Satan could not have done better.

Like any loving parent, our heavenly Father delights in the obedience of His children and finds pleasure in their worship, service, and growth. Whether you are rich or poor, healthy or

sick, your highest joy ought to be to please Him (Ps. 40:8; John 8:29).

♦ —————
**Pleasing
God**

We please the Lord by living holy lives (Col. 1:10; 1 Thess. 4:1ff.), being devoted fully to Him as soldiers (2 Tim. 2:4), living by faith (Heb. 11:5–6), giving generously (Phil. 4:18), obeying parents (Col. 3:20), and accepting and using our spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:18). The Father is well pleased with His Son (Matt. 3:17; 17:5), and when we seek to honor Him, we please the Father. God takes delight in the way of the believer who obeys His will (Ps. 37:23).

♦ —————
JOB 23—24

In the courtroom (23:1–9). Job still wanted to meet God and get a fair trial, but he did not know where to find Him. In the end, when God showed up and asked Job to present his case, Job was speechless. Why? Because beholding the majesty of God made all his arguments useless. He had seen God, and that was all that mattered!

In the furnace (23:10–17). The important thing is not to win an argument with God but to become more like God. For that to happen, you often need the furnace of affliction (1 Pet. 1:6–9), which separates the dross from the pure gold and leaves you a better person. You cannot control the temperature of the furnace or the duration of the testing time, but you can obey Him (23:11) and feed on His Word (23:12).

On the watchtower (24:1–25). Job again presented proof that all sinners are not immediately judged by God. As it were, he took his friends into the watchtower and pointed out various kinds of sinners who seemed to be getting away with their

evil deeds. Job did not deny the fact of God's judgment (vv. 22–24), but he did affirm that man could not fully explain how He worked.

When there are more questions in your life than answers, and when the furnace is hot, remember Abraham's great statement of faith: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. 18:25; see also 2 Tim. 4:8).

JOB 25—26

Bildad's brief speech (the shortest in the book) emphasized the greatness of God (25:1–3) and the nothingness of man (25:4–6). God finds no righteousness in any part of His creation, including the angels, so how could He find it in Job? Again, Bildad was trying to get Job to confess, but he failed. It is too bad Bildad did not encourage Job with the other attributes of God, such as His love, mercy, and grace.

Job's reply (chaps. 26–31) is almost like the "summing up" argument of an attorney. In 26:1–4, he rebuked Bildad for giving him no help at all. These verses suggest ways by which we can help others today, so let us not fail as Bildad did. Your words can bring help and hope to people who desperately need them.

Nobody can escape the eye of God, not even the dead (26:5–6). No matter where you are in creation, He sees you: in the heavens (26:7–9, 13), on the earth (26:10–11), and on the seas (26:12). But the voice of God in creation is only a whisper and we see only the "fringes" of His ways (26:14). Creation clearly reveals the power and wisdom of God, but the grace and mercy of God are seen but dimly.

As you try to help others, keep in mind that "we know in part" (1 Cor. 13:9). It will keep you humble and make you more useful.

JOB 27—28

Justice (27). Job still wanted to take God to court and get his case settled. He was bitter (v. 2; 3:20) because God would not solve his problems *on his terms*. Trials can make you bitter or better, depending on how you relate to God. If you see Him

as an unkind Judge, you will be bitter; if you see Him as a loving Father, you will be better.

Job was right in holding to his integrity (2:9–10). His friends urged him to admit his sins, even if he had not committed them, because that would gain him the favor of God. (Satan's philosophy again!) Job described the judgment of the wicked man, but he did not say that he qualified.

Wisdom (28). "Where is wisdom found?" is Job's key question (vv. 12, 20). Does it have to be mined like silver and gold (Prov. 2:1–9)? In one sense, yes, for wisdom is not found on the surface of things. You must dig into the Word of God and into life if you would have the wisdom of God (Prov. 8:10–11). True wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord (v. 28; Prov. 1:7; 9:10; 15:33; 19:23). When we reverence Him and seek to please Him, He teaches us His wisdom and His way (Isa. 33:6; James 1:5).

*“Knowledge is proud that he has learned so much;
wisdom is humble that he knows no more.”*

William Cowper

JOB 29—30

Longing for the past (29). When life is difficult, it is normal to look back to “the good old days” and want to turn back the clock. But that approach is selfish (note how many times Job says “I” and “my”) and only adds to your pain. It makes enjoying happiness more important than experiencing holiness. Job listed some of the blessings he had enjoyed and some of the services he had performed for others, and all of that should have prepared him to face his trials with confidence.

The past must be more than a memory; it must be a ministry. Today will soon be a yesterday. Are you using today to grow in the Lord so you are prepared for tomorrow? Is life an investment or just enjoyment?

Lamenting the present (30). “But now,” says Job (vv. 1, 16),

and he launches into his complaint about his sufferings. His friends mock him (vv. 1–15), his body hurts him (vv. 16–19), his God has deserted him (vv. 20–23), and his hope has fled from him (vv. 24–31). He cannot return to the past, endure the present, or face the future!

Whenever your circumstances lead you to join Job in the “dust and ashes” (v. 19), remember that the Lord Jesus once was there (Ps. 22:15) and knows how you feel. He is adequate for your yesterdays and tomorrows as well as your todays (Heb. 13:8). Do not just remember your past enjoyments; also remember God’s past mercies (Ps. 77:1–12), and trust Him for the future.

“The good old days are often a combination of a bad memory and a good imagination.”

JOB 31

As he concluded his final defense, Job named specific sins and denied that he had committed them. He knew that God watched him (v. 4) and weighed him (v. 6), and he was not afraid to speak. He wanted more than anything else for God to speak and either accuse him or defend him (v. 35).

This chapter helps you take inventory of your spiritual life. Do you have eyes that wander lustfully (vv. 1–4) or feet that move deceitfully (vv. 5–8)? Has lust been fulfilled in overt sin (vv. 9–12)? Have you treated others as God wants them treated (vv. 13–23)? Have you coveted wealth or been proud of what you possess (vv. 24–28)? How do you respond to the suffering of an enemy (vv. 29–30) or the needs of a stranger (vv. 31–34)? Are you a faithful steward of the natural resources God gives (vv. 38–40)?

Job has seen himself and is satisfied, but he has not yet seen God. When he does, he will change his opinion of himself and get started on the road to victory.

JOB 32—33

Anger. Elihu was polite in his waiting and kind in his speaking, but he was an angry young man (32:1–5). He was angry with Job for accusing God and with the three friends for failing to convince Job of his sins. Elihu agreed with their view that Job was a sinner, but he disagreed with their arguments. We must beware when our speech is motivated by self-righteous anger.

Pride. As the youngest man in the group, Elihu knew his place, but he was still quite sure of himself. The discussion needed *his* opinion (32:6, 10, 17) because everybody else was wrong. He was bursting with words (32:18–20) and could not hold them in. That is the time to ask God for self-control and wisdom, lest your words do more harm than good.

Knowledge. Elihu was sure he was right and challenged Job to refute him (33:1–8). He had not yet learned that Job needed understanding and love and not accusations and arguments. Like the three friends, Elihu had a great many facts in his mind but very little truth in his heart.

He quoted Job's own words (33:9–11) and explained that God owed him no explanation of what He was doing (33:13). God may speak in dreams (33:14–18), in trials (33:19–30), and through people (33:31–33). God had used all three in Job's life, and Job had rejected them! No wonder Job was miserable!

God may indeed teach us valuable lessons at night, in times of pain. Are we listening?

JOB 34—35

God is just (34). Elihu must have been a good listener because he was able to quote Job's words. However, Elihu listened with his ears and not with his heart, which made his speeches harsh and unkind. He was too sure of himself and kept reminding Job and his friends to listen to him (vv. 2, 10, 16, 34). Were their minds wandering?

It was the same old argument: God is just and therefore cannot be accused of sin or partiality. God sees all we do and judges sin righteously. Job has rebelled against God and ought to confess and get right with God!

God is great (35). How important did Job think he was in God's sight? Can his sin or his righteousness affect God? That was only pride on Job's part (vv. 12–13). But Job *was* important to God, so much so that God and Satan had a discussion in heaven about him!

The greatness of God does not mean that He is far from us and unconcerned about us. He is great in His love (Eph. 2:4), mercy (Ps. 86:13), and kindness (Ps. 117:2). He may not immediately take away your trials, but He can give you a song in the night (v. 10; Ps. 42:8; 77:6; 119:62).

“*Any man can sing in the day. . . . It is easy to sing when we can read the notes by daylight; but he is the skillful singer who can sing when there is not a ray of light by which to read. . . . Songs in the night come only from God; they are not in the power of man.*”

Charles Haddon Spurgeon

JOB 36—37

Elihu criticized Job for questioning God, but he did not judge himself for speaking “on God’s behalf.” What pride that any man should claim to have “perfect knowledge” and be able to serve as God’s spokesman and defender! The apostle Paul had been to heaven and back, and had learned great mysteries, yet he never made claims like that (Rom. 11:33–36). No matter how smart you think you are, you never know enough to “play God” in somebody’s life.

“**Behold, God is mighty**” (36:5–21) in power and understanding. He blesses the obedient but judges the ungodly and the hypocrite. (We have heard that someplace before.)

“**Behold, God is exalted**” (36:22–25), and no one can teach Him what is right or accuse Him of doing what is wrong. He is sovereign in all that He does.

“**Behold, God is great**” (36:26–37:24), and we cannot know

Him. (But Elihu claimed to be the spokesman for God!) A storm may have been brewing about that time, and Elihu used it as an example of God's greatness: the water cycle (36:27–28), the clouds, the thunder and lightning. The thunder is God's voice (37:2–5), and the weather is His servant.

How should we respond to the evidences of God's greatness in nature? We should see the majesty of God, thank Him for His provision, and obey and fear Him. But Job knew all this before Elihu was born! Nature does reveal the greatness of God; but it is in Jesus Christ that we see the grace of God, and grace meets our needs.

The Creator and His Creation

When Jesus spoke about nature, He usually emphasized the nearness of God and His care for His people. The Father knows the price of the sparrows, and He observes when they fall to the earth (Matt. 10:29–30). He feeds the birds, even though they never sow or reap (Matt. 6:25–27), and He makes the flowers beautiful, even though they last such a short time (Matt. 6:28–34). We are more valuable to God than the sparrows are, and we live much longer than the flowers, so surely the Father will care for us. Today, God's creation is in travail because of sin (Rom. 8:22); but the Creator is our Father, and we can trust Him to care for us.

JOB 38—39

The storm finally broke on the five men seated on the ash heap, and God spoke to Job out of the storm. We do not enjoy it

when the storm comes, but if we listen for His voice, the storm will accomplish good things in our lives. When the storm was over, Job was ready to meet God and help his friends.

God's Word is light (Ps. 119:105, 130), but too often our words bring darkness. Words without knowledge are like lamps that shed darkness instead of light and only make the situation worse. Elihu recognized this in Job's speeches (34:35; 35:16), but Job did not recognize it. Be sure your words are true; otherwise, you will find yourself in the darkness. (See 1 John 1:5-10 and note the repeated phrase "if we say.")

Job claimed to know a great deal about God (27:11), so God examined him on several subjects: creation (38:4-11), the regulating of nature (38:12-30), the stars and clouds in the heavens (38:31-38), and the ways of the animals and birds (38:39-39:30). Needless to say, Job failed the examination—and so would you and I.

The problems of life are solved not by *reasons* but by *relationships*. Job wanted to reason with God, but what he really needed was to rest in God. Job saw God's greatness and his own littleness, and that was the turning point. However, the smaller we are in our own eyes, the greater God makes us in His sight.

*“I had a million questions to ask God: but when I
met Him, they all fled my mind; and it
didn't seem to matter.”*

Christopher Morley

JOB 40—41

God finally gave Job the one thing he wanted most, the opportunity to meet Him in court and defend his case. Suppose God gave you the same opportunity. What would you say to Him? Would you rather meet God in court or at the throne of grace? The more you meet Him at the throne of grace, the less interested you will be to meet Him in court.

But Job had nothing much to say! He saw himself as insignificant and ignorant and totally unable to face God. The revelation of God completely stopped his mouth. But when we are silent, we can hear God's voice better, even if we are in a storm.

God asked Job many humbling questions, but they can be summarized in these three: (1) "Are you My equal?" (40:6-14); (2) "Can you explain the behemoth?" (40:15-24); (3) "Can you control Leviathan?" (chap. 41). The behemoth was probably the hippopotamus and the Leviathan the crocodile. Job certainly would be afraid to fight these two creatures, *but he was not afraid to challenge God, their Creator!* Job could not control them, but he wanted to tell God what to do!

God made each living thing, including man, suited to its environment and task. But man is not content to be the creature: he wants to be the Creator (Rom. 1:25); and that is Satan's promise to him if he will disobey God (Gen. 3:5). The next time you hear that invitation from Satan, look at God's creation and remember that you are not God.

The Value of Silence

God cannot do much for us as long as we are busy telling Him what to do. He must shut our mouths, as He did with Job (40:4), Moses (Deut. 3:26), and David (Ps. 39:9). The lost sinner's mouth must be stopped (Matt. 22:12; Rom. 3:19). One day, the whole earth will be silent before the glory of the Lord (Hab. 2:20).

JOB 42

Job the sinner. Job had said some rash things during this discussion, but unlike his friends, he had spoken the truth about God (v. 7). Job had a new understanding of God's power and purpose (v. 2), and he realized that he had to repent. Job's

sufferings gave him a new vision of himself and of the glory and greatness of God (Heb. 12:11).

Job the servant. Four times in verses 7-8, God called Job "My servant." Although he had weaknesses and failures, *Job served God during his time of suffering*. By maintaining his faith in God in spite of trials, Job unknowingly silenced the devil and revealed to the world that God is worthy of our trust and worship, no matter how much He allows us to suffer. In the will of God, trials work *for* us, not *against* us (Rom. 8:28; 2 Cor. 4:16-18); therefore, we can work for God as we suffer: Suffering can be a ministry.

Job the intercessor. The friends had said some unkind things to Job and some terrible things *about* Job, *yet he forgave them and prayed for them*. The friends had to do what they admonished Job to do: confess their sins and repent. Do you pray for people who have wronged you (Matt. 5:43-48)? Do you pray for condemnation or restoration?

Job the receiver. Job had wanted to go to court and argue law, but instead he went to the altar and experienced grace. He received forgiveness, friends, family, wealth and honor, twice as much as he had before. God does not guarantee this kind of happy ending *in this life* to everybody who goes through trials (Heb. 11:36-40), but He does promise to reward all who are true to Him (Rev. 2:10). Job came out of the furnace a better person (Job 23:10), and so can you if you will trust God and let Him have His way.

The Trials of Job

If you feel your sufferings are beyond what anybody else has experienced, consider Job's trials. He was shot at like an enemy (6:4; 16:12-13), hunted like a wild animal (10:16), covered by darkness (19:8), uprooted like a tree (19:10), and put into a furnace (23:10). His wife discouraged him, his three friends attacked him and the Lord seemed to abandon

him. However, the greatest example of endurance in suffering is the Lord Jesus (Heb. 12:1–3). He was forsaken even by the Father and suffered the shameful death of the cross. He was made sin for us, yet He was sinless. There was no cause of suffering or death in Him, yet He willingly yielded to the Father's will. He endured, He conquered, and we can conquer in and through Him. Job's suffering makes it clear that God is worthy of our obedience—no matter what "profit" or "loss" may come from obeying Him. God is not obligated to make the righteous healthy and rich or the wicked sick and poor. Our Lord's death and resurrection make it possible for God to transform our suffering into glory, not simply replace it with glory. Job's suffering was replaced with earthly glory, but the believer's suffering will be transformed into heavenly glory. Therefore, our sufferings are not in vain, for the Lord is working out His glorious purposes.

♦ —————

PSALMS

This book is the hymnal of the Bible. The word *psalm* comes from a Greek word that means “a poem sung to musical accompaniment.” Many psalms were sung in the Jewish temple, and the New Testament church also used psalms in worship (1 Cor. 14:26; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). Some of the church’s hymns and praise songs today are based on these inspired poems.

The psalms express man’s praise to God for who He is and what He does. They also express man’s need of God in times of trial and his confidence that God will help. You will find in the psalms a full range of human emotions, from ecstatic joy to despair and contrition. You will also find a revelation of God that brings comfort and encouragement when you trust Him.

That explains why the book of Psalms is so greatly beloved by God’s people, for each of us can identify with the writers as they found God’s grace sufficient in the experiences of life. No matter what your circumstances or feelings may be, there is a psalm that perfectly fits your situation.

The book is divided into five sections, each one ending with a doxology: (1) Psalms 1–41; (2) Psalms 42–72; (3) Psalms 73–89; (4) Psalms 90–106; and (5) Psalms 107–50.

Where to Look in the Psalms

<i>When you cannot sleep</i>	<i>Pss. 3–4</i>
<i>When you have sinned</i>	<i>Pss. 32; 51</i>
<i>When you are ill</i>	<i>Ps. 31</i>
<i>When you need God’s guidance</i>	<i>Ps. 25</i>
<i>When you are traveling</i>	<i>Ps. 121</i>

<i>When people create problems</i>	<i>Ps. 37</i>
<i>When you are downcast</i>	<i>Pss. 42—43</i>
<i>When sinners seem to succeed</i>	<i>Ps. 73</i>
<i>When you are afraid</i>	<i>Pss. 27; 91</i>
<i>When you "feel old"</i>	<i>Ps. 102</i>
<i>When you worry about the future</i>	<i>Ps. 34</i>
<i>When you think about death</i>	<i>Ps. 116</i>
<i>When you are in deep waters</i>	<i>Pss. 124; 130</i>
<i>When problems seem bigger than God</i>	<i>Ps. 139</i>
<i>When you just want to praise Him</i>	<i>Ps. 103</i>

Jesus Christ in the Psalms (Luke 24:44)

<i>The King</i>	<i>Ps. 2 with Acts 4:25–26; 13:33; Ps. 118:26 with Matt. 21:9</i>
<i>The Son of man</i>	<i>Ps. 8; Heb. 2:6–11</i>
<i>The Resurrection</i>	<i>Ps. 16 with Acts 2:25–31; Ps. 22:21–31 with Heb. 2:12</i>
<i>The Crucifixion</i>	<i>Ps. 22:1–21; Matt. 27:35–46</i>
<i>The Shepherd</i>	<i>Ps. 23; John 10</i>
<i>The sacrifice for our sins</i>	<i>Ps. 40:6–8; Heb. 10:1–10</i>
<i>Judas's betrayal</i>	<i>Ps. 41:9; John 13:18–19</i>
<i>The royal Bridegroom</i>	<i>Ps. 45; Heb. 1:8–9</i>
<i>The Ascension</i>	<i>Ps. 68:18; Eph. 4:7–16</i>
<i>The rejection</i>	<i>Ps. 69:4 with John 15:25; Ps. 69:8 with John 7:3–5; Ps. 69:9 with John 2:17 and Rom. 15:3</i>

<i>The eternal Son</i>	<i>Ps. 102:25-27; Heb. 1:10-12</i>
<i>The divine King-Priest</i>	<i>Ps. 110; Matt. 22:41-45; Acts 2:34-35; Heb. 1:13; 7:17-21; 10:12-13</i>
<i>The Stone</i>	<i>Ps. 118:22-23 with Matt. 21:42</i>

PSALM 1

Blessing (vv. 1-3). God enjoys blessing your life, but you must be "blessable." That means having *discernment* (v. 1), avoiding the steps that lead to sin: considering sin (walking), contemplating sin (standing), being comfortable in sin (sitting). Watch that first step!

Blessing involves *delight* (v. 2). The Word guides your walk and rejoices your heart (Jer. 15:16). Meditation is to your inner person what digestion is to your body: you make the Word a part of your life and you grow.

Blessing involves *dependence* (v. 3). Your spiritual roots go deep into the resources of God's grace, and you bear fruit because His life is at work in you.

Perishing (4-6). How tragic that anyone is perishing when Jesus offers abundant life! Contrast *tree* and *chaff* if you want to see the difference between the godly and the ungodly. The godly receive blessing but the ungodly receive judgment.

The psalm starts with "blessed" and ends with "perish." The choice is yours.

Psalms and Hymns

Some of our best-loved songs are based on psalms.

TITLE	COMPOSER	PSALM
"A Mighty Fortress"	Luther	Ps. 46
"O God, Our Help in Ages Past"	Watts	Ps. 90

TITLE	COMPOSER	PSALM
"The King of Love My Shepherd Is"	Baker	Ps. 23
"Joy to the World"	Watts	Ps. 98
"Ivory Palaces"	Barraclough	Ps. 45
"O Worship the King"	Grant	Ps. 104
"All People That on Earth Do Dwell"	Kethe	Ps. 100
"Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven"	Lyte	Ps. 103
"Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken"	Newton	Ps. 87
"Under His Wings"	Cushing	Ps. 91

PSALM 2

God hears (1-3). He hears the raging of the nations and the plots of the rulers. What do they want? *Freedom from God!* But the way to real freedom is by submission and not by rebellion. To throw off God's will is to invite bondage and destruction.

God laughs (4). Puny man does not worry God with all his noise and threats. God is on His throne and has everything in control. When the world's noise frightens you, turn to the Lord and let Him take over (Acts 4:23-31).

God speaks (5-12). God the Father announces that His King is enthroned in the heavenly Zion where the nations cannot touch Him. God the Son announces that the nations are His, so their rebellion is futile (vv. 7-9). Finally, God the Spirit invites the rebels to submit and be blessed instead of destroyed (vv. 10-12).

Over the noise of the nations, listen for the assuring voice of God.

PSALM 3

If worry keeps you from getting a good night's sleep, Psalms 3 and 4 are what you need. Both psalms were probably

written when David was exiled from Jerusalem because his son Absalom had stolen the kingdom (2 Sam. 15–18). Psalm 3 is a morning psalm (v. 5), and Psalm 4 is an evening psalm (v. 8).

How was David able to sleep when he was in such danger? The enemy was against him (vv. 1, 6) but David knew that God was for him. God surrounds you (v. 3), sustains you (v. 5), and saves you (v. 7). When people discourage you (v. 2), God lifts up your head and keeps you going (v. 3).

God never sleeps (Ps. 121:3–4), so why should you stay awake and worry?

“If you can’t sleep, don’t count sheep—talk to the Shepherd!”

PSALM 4

David wrote this psalm as he was about to retire for the night (v. 8). He could not do much about the war around him, but he could do something about the war within him. He did not want to lie in bed and worry, so he committed himself and his situation to the Lord.

He asked (1–3). Asking the Lord for help is still a good way to deal with inner turmoil (Phil. 4:6–7).

He believed (4–5). He faced his anger honestly and gave it to the Lord (Eph. 4:26). Instead of lying in bed and thinking about your problems, meditate on the Lord and offer Him sacrifices of praise.

He received (6–8). In the darkness, he saw the face of God and received light. In his sorrow, he discovered the gift of gladness. In the time of battle, he received peace. God did not immediately change the situation, but He did change David; He can do the same for you.

PSALM 5

When he served in King Saul’s court, David was often attacked by some of Saul’s officers who flattered the king and

lied about David (vv. 4–6, 9). King Saul actually believed that David was trying to steal the throne. When people lie about you, follow David's example and pray about the matter. Note his requests.

Hear me (1–6). David began the day with his heart lifted up to God. God knew the sinful words of the liars, but He also heard the believing prayers of His servant.

Lead me (7–8). David had to be careful because Saul and his leaders were watching him and his life was in danger. He worshiped God and asked for God's daily direction.

Protect me (9–10). David did not fight Saul or Saul's men; he left those battles to the Lord. He trusted God to care for him, and God did not fail.

Bless me (11–12). Protection is the last thing named (v. 12). Beyond that, David was blessed with joy, confidence, and a deeper love for the Lord. Times of suffering can be times of growing if we let the Lord have His way.

PSALM 6

This psalm grew out of an experience of sickness and pain, when David thought he was going to die. Besides that, he had to put up with the attacks of his enemies who *wanted* him to die. It was a time of deep discouragement for David, but he did not waver in his faith.

The Penitential Psalms

Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143 are known as "The Penitential Psalms." You may use these psalms as your own prayers when you want to confess sin and ask for God's forgiveness (1 John 1:9).

As he prayed, he asked for mercy for his body (vv. 1–2) and his soul (vv. 3–5). Mercy means that God does not give us what we deserve, and grace means that He gives us what we do not deserve. What a loving God He is!

David reminded God of his tears of repentance and confes-

sion (vv. 6-7). His bed should have been a place of rest, but it had become a place of trial as God chastened him.

But there is a happy ending: David was assured and his enemies were ashamed (vv. 8-10)! God heard and answered his prayers! When the night is dark and long, keep on trusting, and the dawn will come in God's good time.

PSALM 7

We do not know what Cush said about David, but apparently he was one of the "court liars" who flattered Saul and made life difficult for David (1 Sam. 24:9). When you have a "Cush" in your life, do what David did.

Be honest with God (1-5). David did not say that the enemy was telling the truth, but he was willing for God to examine him and punish him. He had nothing to hide.

Let God be the judge (6-13). It is wise to let God be the judge because His judgment is always right (1 Cor. 4:3-5). We do not see ourselves and others as He sees, so it is best to turn the matter over to Him. David was careful to maintain his integrity (v. 8) and let God be his defense (v. 10).

Wait on the Lord (14-16). Sin has a way of bringing its own punishment if we wait long enough. It is like giving birth to pain and trouble (v. 14; James 1:14-15), falling into a pit (v. 15), or getting back the trouble that they tried to impose on others (v. 16).

Give God thanks (v. 17). What does it matter that men slander us, so long as the righteousness of God prevails and the name of the Lord is glorified!

PSALM 8

The universe is vast and full of grandeur, so why should God pay any attention to weak and insignificant men and women? *But He does!* He can use the weakness of babes to reveal His great strength (Matt. 21:16) and to defeat the enemy (the way David defeated Goliath [1 Sam. 17]). If He can use infants, surely He can use anybody.

You are important because God made you in His image (v. 5; Gen. 1:26-28). Sin has marred that image, but in Jesus Christ, that image can be restored (2 Cor. 3:18; Col. 3:10).

You are important because God has shared His dominion with you (vv. 6–8). Man lost that dominion when he sinned, but Jesus Christ has regained it (Heb. 2:6–8). Can you think of occasions when Jesus Christ proved that He had dominion over beasts, birds, and fish?

Yes, you are important to God, and He has a purpose for you to fulfill. He wants you to “reign in life” through His Son (Rom. 5:17), for you are enthroned in the heavenlies with Him (Eph. 2:6). Why live like a slave when you can live like a sovereign?

PSALM 9

Praise (1–6). God had won a victory for David, so he sang a song of praise to the Lord. It was not a personal battle. Because David was doing God’s will, the Lord maintained his cause. Take time to praise the Lord for the victories He graciously gives you.

Promise (7–12). David looked ahead to the time when God would finally judge sin and establish His righteous kingdom. His people do not need to worry: He is their Refuge and will never forsake them (Heb. 13:5). The Father forsook His Son on the cross, but He will not forsake you.

Prayer (13–20). From considering the past and the future, David turned to his present need as he prayed for God’s help. His need was for mercy; his motive was that he might praise the Lord and tell others of His salvation. Why? Because there is a place called hell (v. 17) and God’s salvation is the only escape from that terrible place.

Paul advised, “Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men” (2 Cor. 5:11).

“The safest road to hell is the gradual one—the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts.”

C. S. Lewis

PSALM 10

Does God hide (1-4)? “Why do the wicked prosper?” is a perennial question God’s people ask. As they consider the suffering of the godly and the security of the ungodly, they feel that God has forgotten and forsaken His people. He is hiding.

Does God hear (5-13)? Note the repetition of “He has said in his heart” (vv. 6, 11, 13). God hears what the ungodly say and does not approve of their pride and rebellion. The ungodly announces, “I shall not be moved! God does not see what I do! Even if He does, He will never judge me!” What arrogance!

Does God help (14-18)? Of course He does! He sees the trouble of His people, feels their grief, and helps them in the right way at the right time. After all, the Lord is King! It may look as though the ungodly are winning the day, but the Lord will triumph in the end.

PSALM 11

David was in great difficulty. Around him, the archers were getting ready to shoot. Under him, the foundations of society were shaking. What should he do? What would you do?

When you are in that kind of situation, your first thought may be to get away as fast as you can. Even David’s friends advised him to act like the bird and fly away. It is right to flee from temptation (Gen. 39:11-13) but not from duty (Neh. 6:10-11; Luke 13:31; John 10:12-13). Instead of flying away like a frightened bird, you should trust God and “mount up with wings like eagles” (Isa. 40:31).

If the foundations are destroyed, *lay the foundations again*. That is what Ezra did (Ezra 3:8ff.) and what each new generation may have to do. David became king of Israel and laid the foundations for a godly society. After all, God is still on His throne (v. 4) and will one day judge the wicked (vv. 5-6). If you love righteousness, God is on your side (v. 7).

“*It is always too soon to quit.*”

V. Raymond Edman

PSALM 12

David's words (1-2). In the previous psalm, David saw the *foundations* failing; in this one, the *faithful* were vanishing from the earth (v. 1). The godly remnant was getting smaller and smaller, and David was feeling very much alone. No wonder he cried out, "Help, Lord!"

Man's words (3-5). What made David conclude that godliness was on the decline? *The way people spoke*. David heard flattering words, proud words, and oppressive words, and he knew that God was displeased. In our "age of communication," are you able to discern what is true and right? When you speak, is it communication or manipulation?

God's words (6-8). God's Word is pure, proved, and preserved, and you can depend on it. So much of what man says is cheap and temporary, but God's Word is like pure silver that is valuable and lasting. Let your words be controlled by His Word and God will make your words valuable (Prov. 10:20; 25:11).

PSALM 13

Asking (1-2). Four times David asked, "How long?" He had prayed, but God had hidden Himself and not answered. David had examined his heart and knew of no reason why God should abandon him. The longer God waited, the more the enemy would succeed. When you have this same feeling, do what David did and talk to God with an honest and humble heart.

"It is faith's work to claim and challenge lovingkindness out of all the roughest strokes of God."

Samuel Rutherford

Arguing (3-4). Would God be glorified by David's defeat? Would God's cause be helped by David's death? Should the enemy rejoice while God's people suffer? David reasoned with God but did not try to tell God what to do. Sometimes prayer means wrestling.

Affirming (5-6). Faith does not always give answers, but it does give encouragement. No matter how successful the enemy appears to be, you can trust the Lord, rejoice in the Lord, sing to the Lord and know that He will always deal bountifully with you.

Don't Despair

"How long?" is a question frequently asked in the Psalms: 6:3; 35:17; 74:10; 79:5; 80:4; 82:2; 89:46; 90:13; and 94:3. Time seems to rush by when we are enjoying life but to linger when we are suffering. God knows how long our trials should last because He knows exactly what we need (1 Pet. 1:6-8).

PSALM 14

The contrast is between the generation of the wicked and the generation of the righteous (v. 5). The latter group is made up of those who have trusted the Lord and seek Him and His will (Ps. 24:6).

The generation of the wicked is composed of people who are "practical atheists": God is not in their hearts, no matter what they may say and do outwardly. They can live without God! They disobey God and exploit people made in the image of God. They are corrupt (v. 1), and so they do corrupt things.

The generation of the righteous calls on the Lord and He answers (v. 4). God dwells with these people (v. 5), protects them (v. 6), and gives them joyful hope (v. 7). The group may not be large, but it is precious to God; and the future of God's program rests with it.

Of which group are you a member? Have you made your allegiance known?

PSALM 15

David loved God's house and longed to dwell there and fellowship with God (Ps. 27:4-5). He yearned to be like the priests who lived in the tabernacle and had constant access to holy things. David wished he could even be a guest and pay God a visit, but did he qualify? Does anybody qualify?

God's children have open access into His presence through the work of Jesus Christ (Heb. 10:19-25). He is our High Priest and Advocate in heaven, and He welcomes us. We come on the basis of His righteousness, not our own. But we had better be sure we have experienced the cleansing of Hebrews 10:22 before we rush into His presence.

This psalm helps us examine our walk, our works, and our words (v. 2). The inventory includes our relationship with others (vv. 3-4), how we keep our promises, and how we use our money (v. 5). Meditating on this psalm and pondering these "qualifications" could help us deepen our relationship with God.

PSALM 16

You have taken a giant step toward true Christian maturity when you can say to the Lord *and mean it*, "My goodness is nothing apart from You" (v. 2).

Good fellowship (3-4). God's people are not perfect, but we should delight in their fellowship and not in the fellowship of the world's crowd (2 Cor. 6:14-18). The world needs our witness, but we must take care not to start loving the world (1 John 2:15-17).

Good heritage (5-6). Not just God's gifts, but God Himself! What a joy it is to let God choose your inheritance for you instead of acting like the world and fighting for your "place in the sun."

Good counsel (7-8). God gives wisdom if you will ask Him (James 1:5). God teaches you in the darkness as well as in the light. These verses are summarized in Matthew 6:33.

Good hope (9-11). This passage is one of the few in the Old Testament dealing with resurrection. It refers to the resurrection of Christ (Acts 2:22-32), and that is what gives us our hope (1 Pet. 1:3).

PSALM 17

“God is Spirit” (John 4:24) and therefore does not have a body. Sometimes Scripture uses the parts of the human body to describe God’s activities with respect to His people. He does not have eyes, but He sees us; He does not have ears, but He hears our cries. David referred to four of these in this psalm.

God’s ears (1–2). The enemy opposed David’s just cause, so he cried out to God for vindication. David’s prayer was sincere, and he wanted God to judge righteously.

God’s eyes (3–5). David had nothing to hide. His heart was right and his walk was righteous. You must be able to say the same of your heart and walk if you expect God to answer your prayers (Ps. 66:18).

God’s hand (6–14). David trusted not his own hand but the hand of God to protect him and to defeat the enemy. The pride of the enemy grieved David because he wanted God alone to be glorified.

God’s likeness (15). God has in mind this goal when He permits you to go through trials: He wants to make you more like His Son (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18). Although this verse may refer to future resurrection (1 John 3:1–3; see also 1 Cor. 15:49), it can be applied to life today. Our Lord goes with us into the furnace so that we may be more like Him when we come out of it (Dan. 3:19–25).

PSALM 18

David sang this song after God delivered him from his enemies and established him as the king of Israel. (See the comments on 2 Sam. 22.) But keep in mind that he often sang to God in the midst of his trials. It is easier to sing after the victory; it takes faith to sing *during* the battle. As David looked back on those difficult years, what did he see?

God’s faithfulness (1–3). God saved David, protected him, and strengthened him when Saul and his men were out to kill him. Is God your refuge and your strength (Ps. 46:1)?

God’s righteousness (4–27). Those had been stormy years for David, yet God rescued him and upheld His dedicated ser-

vant. David had obeyed God's Word and accomplished God's will, so God rewarded him. When the storms come, remember that God is greater than the storms and will help you see the rainbow.

God's gentleness (28–36). God did many things to make David a great soldier, but His gentleness made David what he was (v. 35). God was doing more than winning wars; He was building character. It humbled David to think that God would condescend to call him, equip him, and help him (Ps. 8:3–5). (See Ps. 113:6; Isa. 57:15–16.)

God's exaltedness (37–50). David did not take credit for his victories; he gave all the glory to the Lord. Whatever David had, God gave it to him; whatever he was, God made him; whatever he did, God enabled him. Blessed be the name of the Lord!

PSALM 19

God reveals Himself in creation (vv. 1–6), in the Scriptures (vv. 7–11), and in your heart as you worship Him (vv. 12–14). To be properly “educated” in spiritual things, you must seek to master three books: the book of nature, the Bible, and the book of humanity. A scientist studies the book of nature and a psychologist the book of human nature, but if they ignore God's Book, their conclusions may be wrong. Keep balanced. All truth is God's truth.

The goal of all study is a knowledge of Jesus Christ and of yourself. Verses 7–11 tell you what the Bible can do for you if only you will read it, meditate on it, and obey it. The better you understand your Bible and obey it, the more you will appreciate God's creation and the better you will understand yourself and others. God's Word is the basic book.

Open each day beholding God's glory in Jesus Christ (v. 1). Enter each day with the devotion of a bridegroom and the determination of an athlete (vv. 4–5). At the end of the day, what you have done will please Him (v. 14).

PSALM 20

A day of trouble (1–3). David was going out to battle, and he and his people gathered to pray. His secret of victory was

the name of the Lord (v. 1), the Lord he worshiped sincerely and sacrificially.

A day of triumph (4–6). Again, it is in the name of the Lord that you fight the forces of evil (v. 5). God hears and answers prayer and sends you the help you need.

A day of trust (7–9). David had a great name, but the name of the Lord is much greater. Some people have names that cannot be trusted, but God's name has never failed. Your days of trouble can become days of triumph if you trust in the name of the Lord.

What's in a Name?

In the Bible, names are important because the name represents the person. When somebody had a life-changing experience, the name was often changed. For example, Abram became Abraham and Sarai became Sarah (Gen. 17), and Simon was given the name Peter (John 1:42). The Bible records many names of God, and all of them can be trusted. (See Pss. 9:10; 33:21; 44:5.)

PSALM 21

If Psalm 20 is a prayer before the battle, Psalm 21 is the praise after the victory. Too often we forget to praise God when He answers prayer and gives us what we requested. (See Luke 17:11–19.)

God and the king (1–7). God gave David strength to win the battle and then gave him honor and majesty from the victory. Before the battle, David asked God to spare his life, and God gave him his request. God responded to David's faith by protecting him, and David responded to God's blessings by praising Him. David rejoiced in God's strength and salvation (v. 1) and in His presence with him (v. 6).

God and the enemy (8–12). These were the enemies of God

because they wanted to destroy His people Israel. David fought the Lord's battles, and the Lord gave victory. God kept His promise to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3).

God and the nation (13). Now the whole congregation praises the Lord. Individual praise in private is important, but we should share the joy with others and let them praise God with us. Praise Ye the Lord!

The Shepherd Psalms

Psalms 22, 23, and 24 are sometimes called the "Shepherd Psalms" because they speak of Jesus Christ in His shepherding ministry. In Psalm 22, the Good Shepherd dies for the sheep (John 10:11). In Psalm 23, the Great Shepherd lives and cares for the sheep (Heb. 13:20-21). In Psalm 24, the Chief Shepherd returns in glory for the sheep (1 Pet. 5:4). If you are one of His sheep, your every need is met as you trust Him and follow His leading.

PSALM 22

Crucifixion (1-21). Because he was a prophet (Acts 2:30), David was able to write about the Messiah centuries before He came. Crucifixion was not a Jewish form of capital punishment, yet David described it accurately. As you read, you see Jesus at Calvary: His cry to the Father (v. 1; Matt. 27:46); the period of darkness (v. 2; Matt. 27:45); the ridicule of the people (vv. 6-8; Matt. 27:39-44); His thirst and pain (vv. 14-15; John 19:28); His pierced hands and feet (v. 16; Luke 24:39); and the gambling for His clothes (v. 18; John 19:23-24). Remember, He endured all of these things for you.

Resurrection (22-26). The Savior is no longer on the cross but is alive and in the midst of His people, leading them in

praise for the mighty victory God has won (Heb. 2:11–12). The first day of the week is the memorial to His resurrection, and we follow His example by meeting with God's people and praising the Lord. Resurrection day is victory day!

Coronation (27–31). Christ shares the blessings of Calvary with His church (v. 22), with Israel (v. 23), and with the whole world (vv. 27–31). We must get the message out to every nation that Jesus Christ is Savior and King (v. 27): "The Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world" (1 John 4:14).

PSALM 23

Though Psalm 23 is often read at funerals, its message applies to the days of your life right now (v. 6). The Savior who died for you also lives for you and cares for you, the way a shepherd cares for the sheep (John 10:1–18). If you can say, "The LORD is *my* Shepherd," you can also say, "I shall not want."

The Shepherd feeds us and leads us. Sheep must have grass and water to live, and the shepherd finds those essential elements for them. God meets the everyday needs of your life as you follow Him (Ps. 37:25; Phil. 4:18). Never worry!

If we wander, He seeks us and restores us, as He did with David, Jonah, and Peter. When we need to know which way to go, He shows us the right path and then goes before us to prepare the way. Even in the places of danger, we need not be afraid. (Note the change from "He" in vv. 1–3 to "You" in vv. 4–5.) He is with you!

At the end of the dark valley, He has a special blessing for you: you drink of the refreshing water of life, and you receive the Spirit's anointing. The Shepherd is there to care for every hurt and heal every bruise.

One day, you will look back at your life and see that it was only "goodness and mercy," and that includes the valley experiences. If life is difficult today, just keep following the Shepherd; He will never lead you where He cannot care for you.

PSALM 24

Psalm 22 points to our Lord's grace in dying for us, and Psalm 23 explains His goodness in caring for us. This psalm reveals His glory in coming for us.

Glory in creation (1-2). These verses remind you of Psalms 8 and 19. The world today is in travail because of sin, but the Creator will one day set His creation free (Rom. 8:18-23).

Glory in salvation (3-6). Psalm 15 is a parallel, and both passages emphasize the fact that nobody but the Lord Jesus Christ can meet God's qualifications to live in His holy place. We are all like Jacob, but He is "the God of Jacob" (Ps. 46:7) and will forgive us and let us live with Him forever!

Glory in the kingdom (7-10). These verses may originally have celebrated David's return to Jerusalem from a great victory, but they speak to us of our King of glory. When He rode into Jerusalem, Jesus came in humility and tears (Luke 19:29-44); but when He comes again, it will be in power and great glory (Matt. 24:29ff.).

Your Shepherd is the King of glory!

PSALM 25

This psalm is helpful when you are making decisions and seeking God's will. What kind of people does God guide?

Those who glorify Him (1-2). If you want His will for His glory, He will show you the right path. If you have selfish motives, He may let you have your way, and then you will regret it.

Those who wait (3). You are not wasting time when you wait on the Lord in prayer.

Those who ask (4-5). God wants to show you His ways, teach you His paths, and lead you in His truths. The Word of God and prayer always go together, so spend time in His Word. If you ask Him sincerely, He will answer you clearly.

Those who are clean (6-7, 16-22). Psalm 66:18 applies here, as does 1 John 1:9.

Those who submit (8-15). God does not guide rebels, but He joyfully leads those who fear Him and submit to His will (Ps. 32:8-9). Keep your eyes on the Lord and let Him have His way. He knows where He is going and what He is doing, so follow Him by faith.

The enemy was slandering David again, and he had no way to vindicate himself. Samuel Johnson called slander "the revenge of a coward," and it is. What should you do when people spread lies about you?

“*On every level of life from housework to heights of prayer, in all judgment and all efforts to get things done, hurry and impatience are sure marks of the amateur.*”

Evelyn Underhill

PSALM 26

Examine yourself (1–5). Is your life what it ought to be? Let God test your mind and heart (Ps. 139:23–24). In your walking, standing (v. 12), and sitting, are you keeping yourself clean (Ps. 1:1)? Sometimes God allows the enemy to attack us just to make us take time for a personal inventory.

Focus on the Lord (6–10). If you look at others, you will be upset, and if you look at yourself too long, you may get discouraged, so *focus your attention on the Lord*. Match your defects with His perfections and claim what you need from Him.

Keep serving the Lord (11–12). The enemy wants nothing better than to upset you and get you on a detour (Neh. 6:1–14). Continue to walk with the Lord and serve Him, come what may. Bless the Lord and don’t complain. God will vindicate you in His time and in His own way.

“*Look at others and be distressed; look at self and be depressed; look at Jesus and you will be blessed.*”

Anonymous

PSALM 27

What makes you afraid? Darkness? But the Lord is your light. Danger? He is also your salvation. Deficiency? He is

your strength. Then why be afraid? See what He does for you.

God saves you (4-6). Because he was not a priest, David could not actually go into the tabernacle, but he could still rest in the Lord and trust Him as his refuge. The New Testament equivalent for this is "Abide in Me" (John 15:1-11). In Him is perfect safety.

God smiles on you (7-10). You must go beyond merely seeking God's help. *Seek His face* (Num. 6:22-27). The smile of God is all you need to overcome the scowls of men.

God shows you the way (11-13). Satan wants to trap you, but the Lord will show you the safe way. Believe His promise and walk by faith. His goodness will be with you.

God strengthens you (1, 14). We need strength for the battle and strength for the journey, and God abundantly provides. Be sure to take time to wait on the Lord (Isa. 40:31). If you run ahead of Him or lag behind, you will be a perfect target for the enemy.

PSALM 28

Requesting (1-5). David's enemies were undermining his reputation and his work, so he turned to the Lord with two special requests: that God would speak to him (vv. 1-2) and that God would save him (vv. 3-5). God speaks to us in answered prayer. "If You are silent," said David, "I might just as well be dead! And if You don't deliver me, You are treating me like the enemy!" Pretty powerful arguments!

Rejoicing (6-9). God heard him and helped him, and He does the same for you today as you trust Him. You can rejoice in the Lord even when you cannot rejoice in yourselves or your circumstances. Trust God to be your strength, your song, and your salvation (Isa. 12:2). He is the faithful Shepherd who can carry both you and your burdens.

PSALM 29

Praise before the storm (1-2). David called on the angels in heaven to ascribe praise to God. You never know when a storm is coming, so be sure you are worshiping Him and giving Him all the glory. The greatest beauty of all is the beauty of holiness, and it comes from worshiping the Lord.

Power in the storm (3-9). First the thunder rolled over the Mediterranean Sea. Then the storm broke and moved across the land. Seven times the storm is called "the voice of the LORD." (See Rev. 10:3-4.) What power there is in a storm! Even the angels shout, "Glory!" as they watch it!

Peace after the storm (10-11). David may have seen a rainbow and remembered God's promise given after the Flood (Gen. 9:8-17). God sat as King at the Flood, and He is still King! No storm is greater than God. If you trust Him, the storm will bring glory to God. If life is stormy just now, worship Him and wait on Him. The storm will pass, and He will give you peace.

"God Moves in a Mysterious Way"

*God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea, and rides upon the
storm.
Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take; the clouds ye so much
dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
With blessing on your head.*

William Cowper

PSALM 30

In this song of praise (vv. 1, 4, 11-12) David expressed his thanks to God for the changes God sent to his life.

From sickness to health (1-3). God had healed David and lifted him up from the grave. His sickness had been a discipline from God because of David's pride and self-sufficiency (vv. 6-7). Perhaps it was in connection with the sin of numbering the people (1 Chron. 21).

From weeping to joy (4-5). There is a contrast between God's momentary anger and His gift of lasting joy, between

weeping and joy, and between the night and the morning. Things may seem dark to you now, but wait for His morning to dawn. He can change everything in a hurry!

From mourning to singing (8-12). David humbled himself before God and begged for help and mercy. When God saw that the discipline had done its work, He healed David and forgave his sins. David changed clothes, picked up his harp, and began to sing praises to the Lord.

No matter how dark the night, dawn will come. No matter how heavy your heart, one day there will be a song. Wait patiently and trust the Lord. "His favor is for life" (v. 5).

"Joys are always on the way to us. They are always traveling to us through the darkness of the night. There is never a night when they are not coming."

Amy Carmichael

PSALM 31

Foes. David's enemies persecuted him, lied about him, and spread a net to catch him. Where could he turn for help? Only to the Lord! If the hand of the enemy is against you (vv. 8, 15), find safety in the hand of the Lord (vv. 5, 15; John 10:27-29). Jesus quoted verse 5 when He was on the cross (Luke 23: 46).

Feelings. David was ill, possibly as the result of his own disobedience (vv. 9-13). God can use enemies and sickness to chasten us and bring us to a place of submission. David's enemies laughed at him and his friends ignored him. All David could do was turn to the Lord for help, and the Lord did not fail him.

Faith. The emphasis is on David's faith in the Lord. Because of his faith, David was not ashamed (v. 1) but rejoiced in God (vv. 6-7) and enjoyed the smile of God upon his life (vv. 14-16; Num. 6:22-27). He knew that God's goodness would carry him through (v. 19).

True faith is never alone, for it leads to love and hope (vv. 23–24), which give you the courage you need to win the battle, whether the foe is within or without.

PSALM 32

This penitential psalm grew out of David's experiences with the Lord after he had committed adultery and had tried to hide his sins (2 Sam. 11–12). When you refuse to confess your sins, the Lord must deal with you to bring you to repentance (Prov. 28:13). The longer you wait, the more miserable you will be, as you can see in David's experience. You must face the following:

The debt against you (1–2). God sees what you do and keeps a record of it. David had covered his sins on earth, but he could not cover the record in heaven. When we confess, God wipes the record clean (1 John 1:9).

The pain within you (3–5). Sin affects the body, and God's disciplines are painful but needful (Heb. 12:1–11). David became like an old man carrying a heavy burden.

The flood around you (6–7). God uses difficult circumstances to bring you back to Himself. In fact, because of his sins, David went through many deep waters with his family.

The road before you (8–9). David was like a stubborn animal that needed to be broken. When you are out of the will of God, your decisions will often create problems instead of solve them. The way gets harder.

David went from silence (v. 3) to singing (v. 7) because he finally was honest with God and confessed his sins (vv. 5–6).

PSALM 33

God's Word in worship (1–5). We dare not separate worship from the Word of God, for we must worship "in truth" (John 4:24). The better we know the Scriptures, the better we will be able to praise Him (Col. 3:16ff.).

God's Word in creation (6–9). God spoke the universe into existence (Gen. 1; John 1:1–3), and His Word controls it (Ps. 147:15–18). What a powerful Word it is!

God's Word in history (10–17). The nations may confederate and rebel against God, but His Word will prevail (Ps. 2).

Military strength is no guarantee of success. God has a plan for the nations, and He will fulfill it (Acts 17:24-28).

God's Word in your life (18-22). The Word that created and controls the universe can also control your life. When you trust His Word and obey it, all the universe works for you. When you abandon that Word, all the universe works against you (Jon. 1).

Never fear the will of God because it comes from the heart of God (v. 11).

“Blessed are the single-hearted, for they shall enjoy much peace . . . If you refuse to be hurried and pressed, if you stay your soul on God, nothing can keep you from that clearness of spirit which is life and peace. In that stillness you will know what His will is.”

Amy Carmichael

PSALM 34

Fearful that Saul would kill him, David fled to Gath and sought the protection of the enemy (1 Sam. 21:10-22:2). But you are never safe out of the will of God, and David had to lie to escape. This psalm is David's personal testimony of what God did for him.

“I will bless” (1-10). David had every reason to praise the Lord, for the Lord had rescued him from certain death. When you call on the Lord in faith, He saves (vv. 4-6), He keeps (v. 7), and He satisfies (vv. 8-10). Why run to the enemy when you can run to the Lord and be safe?

“I will teach” (11-22). David wanted the next generation to know the Lord and trust Him. He gave some wise counsel about how to have “good days” (vv. 12-14; 1 Pet. 3:8-12), and he urged them to call on the Lord in the time of trouble. God's eyes see your needs, God's ears hear your prayers, and God is near you when your heart is broken.

When God does something special for you, tell somebody else. The next generation needs to know that God is alive.

PSALM 35

Like David, you need God's deliverance from two different enemies.

Those who attack you (1-10). There are places in this world where it is a dangerous thing to be a Christian, and their number may increase. After all, Satan is a murderer (John 8:44) and would destroy all of God's people if he could. But the Lord fights for us. He has effective weapons (vv. 2-3) and knows the enemy's plots (v. 4). If you belong to the Lord, He is responsible to care for you.

Those who accuse you (11-28). Satan is an accuser as well as a murderer (Rev. 12:10), so David had to move from the battlefield to the courtroom where his enemies were lying about him. His prayer changed from "Fight for me!" to "Vindicate me!" (vv. 23-24). But his concern was that God's name, not his own, be magnified (v. 27). When the enemy slanders your name, he attacks the name of the Lord as well.

Note the results: "And my soul shall be joyful" (v. 9); "And my tongue shall speak of Your righteousness" (v. 28). Joy on the inside and witness on the outside!

PSALM 36

Man's wickedness (1-4). David had seen a good deal of life and knew what human nature was like. He knew his own heart as well! But in this psalm, he shared a special oracle that God gave him. The sinner flatters himself that he "gets away" with sin. He lives on lies as he plots against the godly. His words and his works are evil, but that does not bother him.

God's faithfulness (5-7). What a vivid contrast to the unfaithfulness of the sinner! God can be trusted always to do what is right, and the safest place in the world is under His shadow in the Holy of Holies (v. 7).

The believer's blessedness (8-12). God satisfies His people with the water of life and the light of life. He protects from the enemy and provides for every need. The word "pleasures" in

verse 8 is *Eden* in the Hebrew. When you dwell in God, you are in Paradise!

PSALM 37

This psalm shares the wisdom of an old man who had walked with the Lord (v. 25). He had battled with evil men and knew the frustration of seeing the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer. As he reviewed the past, he gave some wise counsel to keep us from fretting against the Lord when things are not going the way we want them to go.

“Trust in the LORD” (3). If you walk by sight and not by faith, you will find it easy to fret. (See Ps. 73.) The wicked seem to be prospering, but they will not last (vv. 35–36). Believe what God says in His Word because that is where you find reality.

“Delight in the LORD” (4). Find all your joy and pleasure in His will. Make Him your delight, and your desires will be in His will. Living to please the Lord sets you free from fretting about what men are doing.

“Commit your way to the LORD” (5). When you trust Him and delight in Him, how could you do anything other than commit your way to Him? Let God guide your steps, choose your joys, protect your name, and bless your work.

“‘Rest in the Lord; wait patiently for Him.’ In Hebrew, ‘Be silent to God and let Him mold thee.’ Keep still and He will mold thee to the right shape.”

Martin Luther

“Rest in the LORD” (7). Restlessness is an evidence of unbelief. Faith rests in the Lord and enjoys “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding” (Phil. 4:7). God sometimes waits in answering prayer so that He might strengthen our patience (James 1:2–8).

“Wait on the LORD” (34). For what are you waiting? *The inheritance God has for you* (vv. 11, 18, 22, 29, 34). The wicked

have only temporary pleasure on earth, but God's people have eternal treasure in heaven. You will one day receive your inheritance, so be patient.

PSALM 38

This is the third of the Penitential Psalms (cf. Ps. 6), and it reveals what happens to you when you sin.

What God does (1-2). God loves you too much to allow you to sin and get away with it. If you disobey, He will first rebuke you and then chasten you. He will shoot His arrows from a distance or come closer and put His hand on you, but He will let you know that He is displeased.

What sin does (3-10). David suffered from sickness because of his sin (Ps. 32:3-5). He carried a heavy burden and was crushed under it. He sighed and panted and was ready to quit. Sin comes as a friend to entice you and then becomes a master to enslave you.

What people do (11-14). Sin puts a wall between you and those who can help you, but it builds a bridge between you and those who want to exploit you and hurt you.

What Happens to Sins

When you trust Christ, what does God do with your sins? He takes them away (John 1:29); forgets them (Heb. 10:17); washes them away (Isa. 1:18); blots them out (Isa. 43:25); wipes them out like a cloud (Isa. 44:22); pardons them (Isa. 55:7); and buries them in the depths of the sea (Mic. 7:19).

What the sinner must do (15-22). The only hope is to confess sin and cry out to God for mercy. He promises to forgive, so claim His promise.

PSALM 39

God's silence to David. David had sinned, and God was correcting him. Chastening is a sign of God's love (Heb. 12:5–11), so submit to His will and let Him have His way. God had been silent to David (v. 12), and that worried him. Was he going to die (Ps. 28:1)?

David's silence to God. David was silent before the Lord and did not argue with Him (v. 9; see also Lev. 10:3; 1 Sam. 3:18). David accepted God's will and submitted meekly. He prayed that God would forgive him and help him, and God answered in His mercy.

David's silence before the wicked. When wicked men came to visit him in his sickness, David tried to be silent before them (Matt. 7:6). But he finally had to speak and remind himself and them that man was frail and life was short. Life is only a handbreadth long, a vapor that comes and goes (James 4:14) and a mere shadow. We are strangers and sojourners (v. 12), and the journey is not a long one. Why gather riches when you cannot take them with you when you go?

Silence sometimes is louder than speech. Know when to speak and when to be silent.

PSALM 40

Waiting (1–3). While experiencing trials at the hands of his enemies, David asked God for help, but the answer did not come immediately. He waited—and then God worked! What a change took place: David went from a pit to a highway, from miry clay to a rock, and from crying to singing!

Witnessing (4–10). When God does a great thing for you, share it with others. God's works and thoughts ought to be a part of your daily conversation. Share the good news by what you say and do. God can use your witness to bring others to Himself (v. 3).

Warring (11–15). So often David found himself surrounded by danger, and all he could do was turn to the Lord for help. You may not be battling against armies, but you are part of a spiritual warfare that demands diligence and devotion (Eph. 6:10ff.).

Worshipping (16–17). No matter what the problem, David took time to worship the Lord. When you do this, it helps to put things into perspective, and you see what God is doing for you. The important thing is that God is magnified. You may get impatient with Him, but He thinks about you and is working everything together for your good (Jer. 29:11).

The Ultimate Sacrifice

Psalm 40:6–8 is quoted in Hebrews 10:1–14 as referring to Jesus Christ. He came to hear God’s will (the open ear [Isa. 50:4–6]) and to do God’s work (the prepared body). His body was prepared in Mary’s womb by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:26–38; see also Isa. 7:14). Jesus delighted to do the Father’s will because the Word was in His heart (John 4:34; 8:29). If you delight in God’s Word, you will delight in God’s will (Ps. 1:1–3). Jesus Christ is the sacrifice for sins that God has appointed, and in His death, He fulfilled the Old Testament sacrifices. His one sacrifice has settled the sin question once and for all—forever.

PSALM 41

As David lay sick, he *looked back* and recalled that he had been merciful to others and had helped the poor. This encouraged him, for he knew that God would help him (Deut. 15:1–11). God is merciful to those who show mercy to others (Matt. 5:7). When you are in pain, it is good to have a clear conscience to encourage you.

Then David *looked around* and saw that his enemies were gossiping about him and wishing he were dead. Even his

close friend turned against him. If this happens to you, keep in mind that it also happened to Jesus (John 13:18). Greater than the pain of sickness is the pain of having a treacherous "friend."

Finally, David *looked up*, and that solved his problems. No matter what others might say, God was well pleased with David, and that was all that mattered. Let David's enemies spread their gossip. God would raise him up, hold him up, and brighten him up with the light of His countenance.

Sometimes, how you feel depends on where you look.

PSALMS 42—43

The refrain "Why are you cast down, O my soul?" ties these two psalms together (42:5, 11; 43:5). Why was the writer so depressed?

For one thing, God seemed far from him in his hour of need (42:1-3). He felt like a thirsty deer in the desert, searching for water. But the Lord is never far away; He is near even when you do not recognize Him (Isa. 41:10; Heb. 13:5; Ps. 46:7).

The writer's depression was aggravated because he looked back at "the good old days" (42:4-6). He longed to return to Jerusalem and minister in the temple. Sometimes retirement or a change of residence will make people depressed. The older we get, the less we enjoy change.

"When a man gets to despair he knows that all his thinking will never get him out. He will only get out by the sheer creative effort of God. Consequently he is in the right attitude to receive from God that which he cannot gain for himself."

Oswald Chambers

The discouraging talk of others was a third contributing factor (42:3, 9-10): "Has God forgotten you? Where is your

God?" The answer is in Psalm 115. Listen to God and not to the foolish talk of men.

What should you do when depression starts to control you? "Hope in God" (42:5, 11; 43:5). Look at the future and not at the past. If you feel drowned by circumstances, keep in mind that they are *His* waves and billows (42:7), and He knows what is best for you. Stop feeding on your feelings (42:3) and start feeding on His Word (43:3). God will guard you and guide you, no matter how miserable you may feel. God is greater than your feelings. Walk by faith and He will see you through.

PSALM 44

The nation was facing a crisis, and it seemed that God had forsaken His people and was helping the enemy (vv. 9–16). Israel was a scattered people, shamed and scorned. What do you do when it looks like God is on the side of the enemy?

You remember what God did (1–3). This does not mean living in the past but learning from the past. Your situation may be painful, but God has not changed. He can still work wonders and glorify His name.

You trust in Him (4–8). If you trust your own resources, you will fail. Sometimes God allows defeat just to remind you that you must trust Him and Him alone.

You remain faithful to Him, come what may (17–26). Remember Satan's lie about Job (Job 1:6–12)? Is yours a "commercial" faith? Are you faithful to God only because He does good things for you? God tests your faith to see if it is sincere (1 Pet. 1:6–9). Trust Him even though you may not fully understand what He is doing (Job 13:15).

PSALM 45

Written for a royal wedding, this psalm is messianic (vv. 6–7; Heb. 1:8–9) and shows us Christ the Royal Bridegroom.

His beauty (1–2). When He was here on earth, Jesus had no special beauty that would attract people (Isa. 53:2). It is the beauty of His character, His words, and His works that makes us love Him (1 Pet. 1:8).

His battles (3–5). He came a Savior, but He was also a warrior and defeated Satan (Matt. 12:25–29; Col. 2:15). He con-

quers today through His people as we yield to Him and practice truth, humility, and righteousness. One day He will come to conquer all the kingdoms of the world (Rev. 11:15; 19:11-21).

His bounties (6-9). Who else has an eternal throne, a righteous scepter, gladness, and the fragrance of grace and glory? If you know the King, you share all His bounties.

His bride (10-17). This is a picture of the church (Eph. 5:25ff.), all those who have been saved through faith in Christ. The Bridegroom is ready (v. 8), the attendants are ready (v. 9), and the bride is brought to the King with rejoicing. What a wedding that will be (Rev. 19:1-10)! Are you eagerly looking forward to being there?

PSALM 46

Some Bible students believe that this psalm was written in connection with the dramatic deliverance of Jerusalem from the Assyrians (2 Kings 18-20). This song was the inspiration for Martin Luther's "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," and it can be an inspiration to you today.

When things are changing and threatening around you, focus your attention on God. He is with you (His presence); He is a refuge (His protection); He helps you (His power). Your world may be shaken with convulsions (vv. 2-3), but He has a river to give you peace (v. 4). You may be in the midst of battles, but He will end the war victoriously (vv. 8-9).

"Be still" (v. 10) means "take your hands off, relax." God knows what He is doing, and His timing is perfect (v. 5). When it is all over, He will be exalted (v. 10), and you will be blessed.

Wise Counsel

When you are nervous and fidgety, wanting to interfere with God's plans for your life, remember these three admonitions: "Be still!" (Ps. 46:10); "Stand still!" (Exod. 14:13); and "Sit still!" (Ruth 3:18).

PSALM 47

If you prefer quiet meditative worship, this psalm will challenge you, for it describes a praise celebration that involves hand-clapping, shouting, and loud singing. The cause of this excitement is the greatness of Christ our King. (If that does not excite you, what will? Get excited about these things:

His great victory (1-4). We do not know what military victory the psalmist was celebrating, but as believers today, we walk in Christ's spiritual victory (2 Cor. 2:14). Like Joshua, we submit to our Captain and trust Him to win the battle (Josh. 5:13-15). That is something to shout about!

His great throne (5-7). What a picture of the ascension of our Lord, returning to heaven and sitting at the right hand of God! Satan may be the god of this age, but Jesus is King of all the earth. That is something to shout about!

His great reign (8-9). His kingdom is a spiritual kingdom today, but He still rules in the affairs of men. One day, Christ will reign on earth, and His people shall reign with Him (Rev. 1:5-6; 5:9-10; 11:15-18). That is something to shout about!

PSALM 48

Like Psalm 46, this psalm celebrates God's deliverance of Jerusalem from an invading army (vv. 4-7). To Christian believers, Jerusalem and Mount Zion speak of "the Jerusalem above" (Gal. 4:26) and the heavenly Zion (Heb. 12:18-24) where their citizenship is recorded (Phil. 3:20).

Look at the city (1-8). It is the city of God, the Holy City, beautiful and joyful. But to the enemy who does not know the Lord, it is an awesome place that speaks of judgment. Ponder your heavenly destiny so that you may live a happier and holier life.

Enjoy the city (9-11). It is a place of God's loving-kindness and righteousness, where His name is praised and His people rejoice. You are not in the heavenly city yet, but you can still enjoy "the powers of the age to come" (Heb. 6:5). "Little faith will take your soul to heaven," said Charles Spurgeon, "but great faith will bring heaven to your soul."

Celebrate the city (12-14). Tell others what God has pre-

pared for His people and invite them to become citizens of Zion by faith in Christ (Luke 10:20). To know the God of glory is to know a faithful Guide who will care for you in life and take you to Mount Zion when you die. What more could you want?

“If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were precisely those who thought most of the next. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this.”

C. S. Lewis

PSALM 49

Whether you are rich or poor, this psalm is for you (v. 2) because it deals with two important subjects: death and money. “Do not boast in your wealth or trust in your wealth,” wrote the psalmist, and he explained why.

Your wealth cannot prevent death (5–9). When Queen Elizabeth I was dying, she said, “All my possessions for one moment of time.” Although money can buy medicine and professional help, it cannot buy God off when the death angel comes to claim you.

Your wealth cannot go with you (10–15). The dead bodies of both men and beasts turn to dust in the grave, and the rich are not exempt from this end. When a believer dies, the spirit goes to be with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:1–8), but you cannot take your wealth with you (v. 17). However, you can send it ahead as you share it with others in the name of the Lord (Matt. 6:19–34).

Your wealth cannot buy permanent fame (16–20). Men praise the rich while they live, honor them when they die (and perhaps hope to inherit something), and then forget them. The rich man can build himself a monument, but he cannot make people remember him.

Verse 15 reveals the believer's assurance of future resurrection (1 Thess. 4:13-18). That is what conquers death and makes life worth living (1 Cor. 15:58; 1 Pet. 1:3).

“There are no pockets in shrouds.”

Jewish Proverb

PSALM 50

This psalm describes a courtroom scene. God is judge, witness and jury, and He brings an indictment against two kinds of “religious sinners.”

Insincere worshipers (1-15). He calls the court to order, not with the rap of a gavel but with the revelation of His glory (vv. 1-3). He indicts His people who offer sacrifices insincerely—their worship is just empty routine—and hope to “earn” God’s blessing. God does not need the things we give Him (Acts 17:24-25), but we need to give Him spiritual sacrifices of thanksgiving, praise, and obedience (vv. 14-15, 23).

“For to worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God.”

William Temple

Hypocritical worshipers (16-22). Here the issue is not sacrifices but the covenant they made with God. They profess one thing and practice another (Titus 1:16); they are guilty of theft, adultery, deceit, and slander. They thought that God’s silence

meant escape from punishment, but they were wrong (Eccles. 8:11).

Judgment begins with God's people, not with the lost world (1 Pet. 4:17). Heed the warning of verse 22 and accept the admonition of verse 23.

PSALM 51

This is the fourth of the Penitential Psalms. Like Psalm 32, it came out of David's sin with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11–12) and his futile attempt to cover it up. If any chapter in the Bible reveals the high cost of sinning, it is this one.

Sin hurts the sinner. David's whole being was affected by his sin: his eyes (v. 3), mind (v. 6), ears (v. 8), heart (v. 10), spirit (v. 10), and mouth (vv. 13–15). He lost fellowship with God (v. 11) and the joy of the Lord (v. 12). Are the pleasures of sin worth paying this great price?

Sin hurts others. Sin can bring tragic consequences to the lives of others (James 1:13–16), especially one's family. David's sin led to Uriah's death. Bathsheba's baby died. David's lovely daughter Tamar was violated by her brother Amnon, who was then killed by Absalom, who in turn was slain by Joab. Is a fleeting moment of sinful pleasure worth a lifetime of sorrow?

Sin hurts God. We hurt ourselves and others when we sin, but primarily, our sins are against God (v. 4). Sin makes us dirty (vv. 2, 7). Sin is rebellion against God's holy law. If you want to know how much sin hurts God, go to Calvary and see His Son dying for the sins of the world. God is love, and our selfish sins break His heart.

*“How sad it is to have to live with the consequences
of forgiven sin”*

William Culbertson

God is merciful and gracious and forgives when we come in repentance and faith (1 John 1:9). David did not want “cheap” forgiveness; he came with a broken heart.

David's Prayer

"Blot out my transgressions" was David's prayer (Ps. 51:1). To see how God answers, read Isaiah 43:25; 44:22; Micah 7:18-19; Acts 3:19; and Hebrews 10:14-18.

PSALM 52

Doeg was an evil man who curried favor with King Saul by spying on David (1 Sam. 21-22). When David learned what Doeg had done, he turned to God for help, for God is the only One who can justly deal with our enemies.

The tongue can be a force for good or for evil. Doeg's tongue was boastful, deceitful, and destructive, like a sharp razor (vv. 1-4). David focused on the goodness of God, not the badness of men, because he knew that God's justice would ultimately prevail.

Doeg looked like a strong luxuriant tree, but he would be rooted up (vv. 5-7) while David would be fresh and fruitful (v. 8; Ps. 37:34-38). God protected David's name because David trusted God's name (v. 9). More people call their sons "David" than "Doeg."

PSALM 53

In this adaptation of Psalm 14, "God" (Elohim) is used instead of "Lord" (Jehovah); verse 5 has more words; and verse 6 has fewer words. Some psalms were adapted by the musicians for various uses in the temple worship. One of the wonders of Scripture is that it can be applied to every situation.

What you think concerning God helps to determine your character and conduct. The fool ignores God and exploits people made in the image of God. Many people are "practical atheists"; they may claim to believe there is a God, but they live as though He did not exist. Are you guilty of this?

God will have the last word!

PSALM 54

David had not bothered the Ziphites, yet they turned against him to win favor with King Saul (1 Sam. 23:15-23). The world does not love God's people and even strangers will create problems for you while you seek to serve the Lord.

Do what David did: pray for God to take charge, protect you and vindicate you against your enemies. God hears (v. 2) and God helps (v. 4). When the answer comes, be sure you take time to praise the Lord (v. 6).

PSALM 55

Troubles around him (vv. 1-3), terrors within him (vv. 4-5), and treachery next to him (vv. 12-15, 21) combined to make David wish he could get away from it all (v. 6). It was not easy being God's anointed king, for with the privileges came great burdens and responsibilities, and God's enemies became David's enemies. Leadership is not easy.

David wanted wings like a dove so he could fly *away from* the storm. What he really needed were wings like an eagle so he could fly *above* the storm (Isa. 40:31). How do you get them? By going into the Holy of Holies, under the shadow of His wings (Pss. 57:1; 91:1-4). When you call on the Lord (v. 16) and cast your burdens on Him (v. 22), He enables you to overcome.

You cannot fly beyond the storm because you will find problems everywhere, but you can fly above the storm. God permits the burdens you face today to help you "win your wings." Claim verse 22 and 1 Peter 5:7.

PSALM 56

David prayed this prayer while he was in danger in enemy country (1 Sam. 21:10-15). After God delivered him, he wrote Psalm 34 as an expression of praise. When you are in the midst of trouble, remember these truths about God.

God sees where you are (8a). David should not have been in Gath to begin with, but the Lord was gracious to go with him and help him. God understands your situation far better than you do!

God knows how you feel (8b). He not only knows your tears, but He records them and retains them! Why? So that one day He may transform them into gems of joy and glory. No tears are ever wasted when you follow Him.

God hears when you call (9). Terrors and tears must be handled with trust (vv. 3-4, 10-11). But be sure your motive is not just deliverance. He delivers us that we might delight in Him and serve Him (vv. 12-13). The highest purpose of prayer is the glory of God.

PSALM 57

This psalm and Psalm 142 are "cave" psalms that can give you great encouragement. Your own "cave" may be a sick-room, a difficult place of ministry, or even a home where there is tension or trouble. If you do what David did, you will experience peace and victory even in the cave.

David's faith transformed his cave into a Holy of Holies (v. 1)! His confidence was not in the rocks but "under His wings." (See Ruth 2:12.) In spite of sharp teeth (v. 4), nets and pits (v. 6), David was sure of God's help.

His desire was not just to escape but to exalt the Lord (vv. 5, 11). In fact, when he awakened the next morning, he picked up his harp and sang praises to God!

Trust Him; exalt Him; sing praises to Him. This approach worked for David in his cave, and it will work for you in your cave.

PSALM 58

In words that may seem unchristian to us, David denounced the unjust rulers of his day, people who promoted evil by condemning the righteous and defending the wicked. In a prayer that would probably not be "Amened" in churches today, he asked God to judge sinners and establish righteousness on the earth.

David used many images as he prayed for their judgment: "Make them toothless lions! Let them disappear like water on the sand or like the slime of a snail! Make them broken arrows! Let them be like stillborn children! Let them burn up

like fuel under a pot! Let them be taken away in a whirlwind!"

You will find similar passages in other Psalms, such as 35:1-8, 26; 59:11-15; 69:22-28; 109:6-20; and 139:19-22. These verses seem to contradict the admonition of Matthew 5:43-48 and the examples of Luke 23:34 and Acts 7:60. How should today's Christian respond?

Because he was God's chosen king, David's enemies were God's enemies (Ps. 139:21-22). No doubt his personal feelings were involved in these prayers, but his great concern was the righteousness of God and the good of God's people. David had the authority to denounce *national* enemies; we have the privilege of forgiving *personal* enemies.

But you cannot forgive enemies until you realize how wicked their words and deeds are. A holy anger against sin, and a forgiving spirit toward sinners, is the mark of a true child of God. The person who has no concern to oppose wickedness in this world does not know the sinfulness of sin or the holiness of God. That believer needs some backbone!

"If the Jews cursed more bitterly than the pagans this was, I think, at least in part because they took right and wrong more seriously. For if we look at their railings we find that they are usually angry not simply because these things have been done to them but because these things are manifestly wrong, are hateful to God as well as to the victim."

C. S. Lewis

One day, God will judge the wicked. When you pray the first three petitions of the Lord's Prayer, you are expressing briefly what David wrote in vivid detail. David left all judgment to the Lord but did his part to further God's holy will on the earth. If more saints today felt a holy anger against sin

(Ps. 4:4; Eph. 4:26), the church might have a more effective ministry as the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

PSALM 59

I will pray (1-7). David compared his enemies to dogs prowling the city streets and growling over the garbage. Saul was after him again (1 Sam. 19:1-11), and only the Lord could deliver David.

I will wait (8-15). David's wife helped him escape that time, but David faced several years of danger and exile before he received his rightful throne. Twice he could have killed Saul, but he refused to do so. He knew that God would deal with his enemies in His way and in His time (1 Sam. 26:8-11).

I will sing (16-17). David had a song in the morning because God gave him joy in the morning (Ps. 30:5). Things often look worse at night, so wait for the morning; God will give you your song of praise.

PSALM 60

Broken (1-3). David and Joab were leading the armies of Israel against two enemies in the north when a third enemy invaded in the south. When you get one problem solved, another one comes along! It seemed that God had abandoned His people and that the end was near.

Bold (4). But David did not run away. Instead, he boldly lifted God's banner of truth and listened for God's word of assurance (vv. 4-8). The Lord is our banner (Exod. 17:8-16), and we can trust Him to give the victory.

Beloved (5). His banner over us is love (Song of Sol. 2:4; Rom. 8:37). The name *David* means "beloved." God's people are beloved not in themselves but in Jesus Christ, the Beloved One (Matt. 3:17; Eph. 1:6). In the midst of life's battles, remember that God loves you.

Believing (6-12). God assured David that He was in control of the nations, so David and Joab stepped out by faith and won both battles. When you feel broken, you are still His beloved. If you believe, you can boldly win the battle. March under God's banner of truth!

PSALM 61

Distance. No matter how far away you go, God hears your prayers, for His ears are open to the cries of His children (Ps. 34:15). David was far from the house of God, yet the Lord heard his prayer and answered.

Depth. No matter how far down you sink, God can lift you up. When life overwhelms you, take time to pray. Let God lift you up and put you on the Rock that will never sink.

Danger. Prayer brings you into the Holy of Holies, under the shadow of His wings (Exod. 25:20), where God's glory dwells. God preserves and protects His own until that hour when He calls them to Himself.

Delight. Do you find delight in prayer, or is prayer only an "emergency exercise" to get you out of trouble? David ended the psalm with an expression of praise and an affirmation of obedience. Prayer changes things, but prayer also changes people, starting with the one who does the praying!

Daily Benefits

*When daily we obey God (Ps. 61:8),
praise His name (Ps. 72:15), and pray
(Ps. 88:9), then daily He shares His
benefits (Ps. 88:9).*

PSALM 62

Waiting on the Lord (vv. 1, 5) does not mean being idle or indifferent because sometimes waiting is harder than working. For your waiting to be meaningful and spiritually productive, do what David did.

Wait silently (1, 5). This means not telling your trials to everybody who will listen or even telling them repeatedly to the Lord. When a child rests in the arms of the mother or father, there is no need to make noise. Much talk is sometimes evidence of little faith.

Wait expectantly (5). God will work as you trust Him and

let Him have His way. Your hope is not in human or material resources (vv. 9–10) but in the power of God (v. 11).

Wait continually (8). It is not easy to wait “at all times,” especially when you feel that God is not following your schedule. If your times are in His hands (Ps. 31:15), you will have perfect peace as you wait for Him to work (Isa. 26:3).

PSALM 63

This psalm probably grew out of David’s painful experience during the rebellion led by his son Absalom (2 Sam. 15:13–23). Imagine the king having to leave his comfortable palace and flee to the wilderness to hide! When you find yourself in a “wilderness” situation, take inventory of the things that really are important. David said:

“I still have God” (1–2). The God you worship in the sanctuary is with you in your difficulty. If you hunger and thirst after Him, He will satisfy you (Matt. 5:6).

“I still have a song” (3–4). David could not go to the altar and offer sacrifices to God, but he could lift his hands and his voice as “spiritual sacrifices” (Heb. 13:15). When you praise God, your inner person is nourished (v. 5), and you are satisfied.

“I still have joy in the Lord” (vv. 6–11). If you cannot rejoice in your situation, you can always rejoice in your Savior: His past help (v. 6), His present protection (v. 7), and His future guidance (v. 8). He hides you and holds you, so you have nothing to fear.

PSALM 64

David’s fear of the enemy. The king asked to be preserved not from the enemy but from the *fear* of the enemy. Fear and faith cannot live in the same heart (Mark 4:40). If the enemy can make you afraid, he has almost won the battle. A calm heart makes a confident soldier.

The enemy’s fear of nothing. They “do not fear” (v. 4) to form secret plans or lead open insurrections. (Absalom’s rebellion, perhaps?) Their words are like swords and arrows, and they set hidden traps. It looks like David is defeated!

The fear of the Lord. “But God” is the turning point in the

story. When the enemy least expects it, God shoots at them, and they fall into their own traps. "All men shall fear" (v. 9), and the righteous shall be glad.

Conquering Fear

On March 4, 1933, during the dark days of the depression, President Franklin D. Roosevelt said in a radio speech, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." On September 7, 1851, the naturalist Henry David Thoreau wrote in his journal, "Nothing is so much to be feared as fear." Three centuries before that, the French essayist Montaigne wrote, "The thing of which I have most fear is fear." People in all ages of history have fought their fears in one way or another, but the only thing that really conquers fear is faith in the Lord: "I will trust and not be afraid" (Isa. 12:2).

PSALM 65

The worship goes up (1-4). This is a harvest psalm for believers who want to thank God for His goodness and care during another year. Praise and prayer go up to the Lord from the hearts of grateful people. We are told that "in everything [we are to] give thanks" (1 Thess. 5:18).

The witness reaches out (5-8). The ends of the earth need to hear about the God of grace and glory. He reveals Himself to them in creation, but they must be told the good news of salvation: God has provided atonement (v. 3). God blesses you that you in turn might be a blessing to others.

The wealth comes down (9-13). How good He is to send the rain, fill the rivers, and water the fields! The fields provide food

for the flocks, and they rejoice at His kindness. We take the rain for granted until it does not fall, and then we learn how much we need it.

You can find joy in God's goodness at the beginning and ending of each day (v. 8), so do not wait until the "crowning" of the year to praise Him (v. 11).

PSALM 66

Come and praise (1-4). He invites the whole world to praise the Lord because God loves the world and sent His Son to be the Savior of the world. When you know Jesus as your Savior, you have something to sing about, but do not do it alone. Share the praise!

Come and see (5-12). This brief review of Israel's history mentions the Exodus (v. 6), the conquest of Canaan (v. 7), and the nation's times of trial (vv. 10-12). When you go through testing in the will of God, keep in mind that the same God who brings you in will see you through and make you better for having been in the furnace.

Come and sacrifice (13-15). Have you ever made promises to God when you have been in the furnace of suffering? Did you keep those promises? When the test was over, did you praise God for what you learned?

Come and hear (16-20). David wanted to tell others that God answers prayer. Worship should lead to witness to the glory of God.

The Lord and David say, "Come!"

PSALM 67

This missionary psalm exhorts us to get the message out to all the nations of the world. Why?

Because they need *light* (vv. 1-2). The lost walk in darkness and need the light of God's face to shine upon them (2 Cor. 4:3-6). They have lost their way and are headed for eternal darkness. Does that burden you?

Because they need *joy* (vv. 3-4a). Sin gives pleasure for only a short time, but in Christ there are "pleasures forevermore" (Ps. 16:11). How can we keep to ourselves the joy that Jesus gives?

Because they need *righteousness* (v. 4b), which can come only through faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:21–31). Man's righteousness can never satisfy the demands of God's holy law.

Because they need *life* (vv. 5–7). "The field is the world" (Matt. 13:38), but that field is not producing fruit to the glory of God. Only with God's life and blessing can the harvest of righteousness come.

If every believer did what you do about missions, would *all* the people of the earth be praising the Lord?

PSALM 68

This victory psalm celebrated how God blew the enemy away like smoke and melted them like wax (v. 2). It pictures three triumphal processions.

The victorious nation (1–16). Great victories were nothing new to Israel, for God had been with them from the beginning. He had delivered them from Egypt and led them through the wilderness into the Promised Land. He gave them Mount Zion and dwelt with them there. What a history of victory! Have you reviewed lately all that God has done for you?

The victorious Savior (17–18). Paul quoted verse 18 in Ephesians 4:8 and applied it to the ascension of Jesus Christ. Believers today are part of a spiritual army, marching in a triumphal procession (2 Cor. 2:14; Col. 2:15) and claiming their inheritance. They are seated with Christ in the heavenlies (Eph. 2:4–6) using their spiritual gifts to serve Him on earth. What a victory!

The victorious singers (19–35). The happy procession reached the sanctuary where they lifted their praises to God and asked for His continued strength as new enemies attacked (vv. 28, 34–35). The God of past victories would not forsake them as they trusted Him and obeyed His will (2 Cor. 1:8–11).

Are you marching like a conqueror in a victory celebration or like a mourner in a funeral procession?

PSALM 69

Psalm 69 begins with sinking (vv. 1–3, 14–15) but ends with singing (vv. 30–36). It goes from prayer to praise, from re-

proach (vv. 7, 9, 10, 19, 20) to rejoicing, because David poured out his heart to the Lord. No matter how painful your situation may be, tell God exactly how you feel.

This is a messianic psalm. Out of David's sufferings, the Lord revealed His Son. (Compare v. 4 with John 15:25, v. 8 with John 7:3-5, v. 9 with John 2:17, v. 21 with Matt. 27:48, and v. 25 with Acts 1:20.) One purpose God has in allowing His people to suffer is that they might become more like Jesus Christ. That makes it worth it all!

This is also an imprecatory psalm (vv. 22-28; review the comments on Ps. 58). Paul quoted these words in Romans 11:9-10, applying them to unbelieving Israel. In attacking King David, the enemy were also rebelling against God and inviting their own judgment.

It is not easy to bear reproach because we want to be accepted and approved by others. But in the battle against sin, God's soldiers are often falsely accused and lied about. When this happens to you, remember that it also happened to David and to Jesus. You are in good company! Meditate on Isaiah 54:17.

“I would rather play with forked lightning, or take in my hand living wires with their fiery current, than speak a reckless word against any servant of Christ, or idly repeat the slanderous darts which thousands of Christians are hurling on others, to the hurt of their own souls and bodies.”

A. B. Simpson

PSALM 70

David was in a hurry when he wrote this brief psalm because God was *not* in a hurry! Three times he cried, “Make haste!” and he ended with, “Do not delay!” Like Peter sinking

into the water, he did not have time for a long prayer. All he could cry was, "Lord, save me!" (See Matt. 14:30.)

Why does God delay answering your prayers? Surely He can see your desperate situation. He promises to give "grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16), which can be translated "grace for well-timed help." *Your Father's timing is never wrong.*

When God waits, He may have a better gift for you than what you are asking Him for (Isa. 30:18). His delays are neither denials nor defeats, so put your times in His hands and wait on the Lord (Ps. 31:15).

God's Perfect Timing

Joseph in prison had to wait for God to free him and then to reconcile him to his brothers. Israel had to wait for deliverance from Egypt, and Moses had to wait through ten difficult plagues before Pharaoh would let the people go. Joshua and Caleb had to wait forty years before claiming their inheritance, and the delay was not their fault. David had to wait to receive his throne. Mary and Martha had to wait for Jesus to come to Bethany, and while they waited, their brother died (John 11). God is not in a hurry even when we are, and His schedule is better than ours.

PSALM 71

The psalmist reviews a life of dependence on God. The Lord cared for him at birth, and he trusted the Lord as a youth (vv. 5-6). God taught him when he was young (v. 17) and was with him during his mature years. Now he is old, and he prays that God will not abandon him (vv. 9, 18).

As you read this psalm, you discover the ideal way to spend old age as a Christian. Devote time to prayer and trust the Lord to help you. Instead of complaining about what is wrong, praise God for His righteousness and goodness. Practice continual prayer (v. 3), continual praise (vv. 6, 8), and continual hope (v. 14).

Depend on His strength and use every opportunity to witness for Him (vv. 15–16). Ask God to make you a walking wonder (v. 7) who will point people to Christ. Keep a song on your lips and in your heart. After all, the best is yet to come!

PSALM 72

Solomon prayed for blessing on his reign when he followed David. A young man, Solomon knew he could not succeed without the help of the Lord. The psalm also pictures our Lord Jesus when He reigns as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Solomon asked for wisdom to administer justice to his people (vv. 1–7), and God granted his request (1 Kings 3). His reign was like a refreshing shower that made the earth fruitful and beautiful (2 Sam. 23:1–7). God can give you wisdom for your tasks (James 1:5) and make you a blessing to others. Do you bring refreshing showers or storms?

Glory Overcomes Gloom

When things around you look dark, just remind yourself that God will one day fill the earth with His glory (Num. 14:21; Pss. 22:27–28; 86:9; Isa. 6:3; Hab. 2:14). Trust Him to see you through (Jude 24–25).

Peace and security prospered while Solomon was on the throne, and Israel's domain was extended. Of course, verses 8–11 especially apply to the Lord Jesus and His glorious reign yet to come, but He can give you peace and safety today as you yield to Him. He wants you to "reign in life" right now (Rom. 5:17).

God's purpose is to fill the whole earth with His glory (v. 19) as He unites all things in Christ (Eph. 1:10). Are you helping to extend His glory on the earth?

PSALM 73

The psalm begins with "God is good" and ends with "It is good" (v. 28), but between those statements, things are not so good!

The philosopher. Asaph's basic premise was correct: God is good. But when he pondered the success of the wicked and the sorrows of the righteous, he began to falter in his faith. It seemed that he was wasting his time and energy being faithful to God because the unfaithful received all the blessings. *He did not realize that what he called "good" was not what God would call "good."* He was walking by sight and not by faith.

The worshiper. The turning point came when he went into the sanctuary and started looking at things from God's viewpoint. *The important thing is not so much what you own or enjoy but where you are going.* What good is an easy death (v. 4) if it ushers you into pain? When life seems unfair, take time to worship and get your spiritual vision properly focused.

The friend. Asaph realized that because he had God as his Friend, he needed nothing else. He had more than the wicked, and what he had would last forever. God would hold him, guide him, strengthen him, satisfy his spiritual desires—and one day, take him to heaven!

We are not philosophers, living on man's explanations. We are pilgrims, living on God's promises, *and His promises never fail.*

PSALM 74

What we see (1–8). Written probably after the destruction of the temple, this psalm reveals the anguish of one who deeply loved God and could not understand why He permitted such desecration. Israel was His flock and His inheritance, and Mount Zion was His dwelling-place; yet He allowed evil men to destroy His people and His house. Why, O Lord?

What we do not see (9–17). God is King, but we do not see His hand working as in past centuries. We see no signs, and

we have no prophet to interpret the times and give us God's message. One of God's judgments is to leave His people without a word of guidance because they have refused to obey His will.

What we want to see (18-23). Surely Asaph knew that the sins of the nation caused the invasion of the enemy and the destruction of the temple. As a faithful Jew, he wanted to see the city and the people delivered and the enemy defeated. That would happen in due time, when God's discipline of His people was ended and their rebellion conquered (Heb. 12:9-11). Meanwhile, all he could do was weep, pray, trust God, and wait.

PSALM 75

God is the Judge; His people are only His witnesses. We can tell others about His great works (v. 1) and His gracious warnings (vv. 4-5), but we cannot tell them when His judgment will fall. God will choose the proper time, and His judgment will be just.

The proud rulers of the nations think they are secure, but the God who set them up can also pull them down (1 Sam. 2:7-8; Dan. 4:25). The wicked think they are getting away with their evil deeds, but one day they must drink the wine of God's wrath.

Meanwhile, God's children continue to sing His praises because they are sure God knows what He is doing. The world needs our witness, and worship is the greatest witness of all. The next time you are disturbed by the evil in the world, pause and praise the Lord.

PSALM 76

God is to be praised (1-6). We do not know what military victory is celebrated here, but it brought great glory to the Lord. The enemy's fortresses (v. 4), soldiers (v. 5), and equipment (v. 6) were unable to stand before the Lord of hosts. It is encouraging to know that God is for us in the battles of life.

God is to be feared (7-12). Man's fury does not frighten God (Ps. 2:1-4). In fact, He uses it to bring Himself glory, like a woman wearing a special garment (v. 10). God is long-

suffering, but one day He will arise to judge the wicked. Meanwhile, His people must also fear Him and be faithful to keep their vows to Him (v. 11). Never trifle with God.

“Judgment for an evil thing is many times delayed some day or two, some century or two, but it is sure as life, it is sure as death.”

Thomas Carlyle

PSALM 77

Joyless days of trouble and sleepless nights of despair plagued the psalmist. Why? Not because of unbelief but because of faith. Because he believed in the Lord, he wrestled with himself and with God. He could not understand why the Lord did not keep His promises and deliver His people from bondage. What do you do in a situation like that?

Of course, you pray (v. 1) and tell God just how you feel. Reach out to Him in the night seasons (v. 2), *but do not refuse the comfort that He sends*. He will remind you of His past works and wonders, and the more you meditate on them, the better you will feel.

Asaph meditated on Israel's exodus from Egypt and recalled that God kept the people waiting by the Red Sea, that it was night, and that deliverance came just in the nick of time. The people were afraid and certain that God had forgotten them, but He showed His power and humiliated the enemy.

His way is a holy way (v. 13) and a hidden way (v. 19). You need not understand it; just follow as He leads you.

PSALM 78

This long psalm reviews the history of Israel: the Exodus (vv. 12-16, 42-53); their wilderness journey (vv. 17-41); the conquest of Canaan (vv. 54-55); and disciplines God sent them there (vv. 56-64). A nation's true history is a record not only of

how the people treated one another but of how they treated God.

But why the long history lesson? For the sake of the generations to follow (vv. 1-8). The Jews were commanded to teach their children the works and ways of the Lord so that each generation would know the Lord and trust Him (Deut. 6:1-9). We have the same obligation today. When Israel stopped doing this, the nation forsook the Lord and God had to chasten them (Judg. 2:7-10).

Israel was a rebellious nation, but God was gracious and gave the people opportunities to start again. This is not an excuse for us to sin and tempt God, but it is an encouragement to repent when we do sin.

God's answer to Israel's needs was to give them a spiritual leader, David, the shepherd. He had both integrity (the heart) and ability (the hands), and he sought to serve the Lord and love the flock of Israel. People have not changed; they still rebel against God. There is still a need for faithful instructors in the home (vv. 1-8) and leaders in the nation (vv. 70-72). Do all you can to help the next generation serve the Lord acceptably.

“*What are all histories but God manifesting Himself?*”

Oliver Cromwell

PSALM 79

Once again Asaph is lamenting the invasion of the enemy (cf. Ps. 74). He had several concerns.

God's inheritance. The temple was defiled, the city destroyed, and the people slain. God permitted these things to happen to His inheritance! But God would rather destroy His inheritance than allow His people to sin and rebel.

God's name. What will the heathen nations say about Israel and Israel's God? The corpses and ruins bore witness to something that the world needed to know: *God is holy and*

does not tolerate disobedience. Asaph confessed the sins of the nation and asked God to honor His name before the nations (vv. 8–10, 13).

God's wrath. Asaph asserted, “Pour out Your wrath” (v. 6)! “Avenge our blood” (v. 10)! Years later, that prayer was answered, and God punished Babylon for the way she treated Israel.

God's people. They are “Your servants” and “Your saints” (v. 2), “the sheep of Your pasture” (v. 13). Care for them, Lord! Deliver them! God did care for them, but He also chastened them so that they might learn to obey His will.

When you want God to be harder on others than He is on you, it is time to start seeing your sins the way God sees them.

PSALM 80

Asaph prayed for the restoration and illumination of God's people by the shining of God's face (vv. 3, 7, 19; Num. 6:22–27). He gave two pictures of the nation.

A flock (1–7). Israel was like a flock of sheep led by God (Pss. 77:20; 78:52): “We are His people and the sheep of His pasture” (Ps. 100:3). But they were *wayward* sheep who would not follow the Shepherd. So, instead of enjoying green pastures and still waters (Ps. 23:2), they were enduring tears and the reproach of the enemy (v. 5).

A vine (8–19). This picture parallels Isaiah 5 and our Lord's parables in Matthew 21:28–46. Israel was a fruitful vineyard until she turned from the Lord and began to worship the gods of the nations. God used those very nations to discipline His people and destroy the vineyard. The prayer in verses 17–18 was partially answered when some of the people returned to the land after the captivity, but it is fully realized in Jesus Christ.

God's people today are sheep in the flock (John 10) and branches in the Vine (John 15). Do not take your blessings for granted. He is seeking faithfulness and fruitfulness.

PSALM 81

The things that were (vv. 1–10). This section is an invitation for the people to participate in a joyful celebration, probably

Passover. Asaph gave them two reasons for sharing: obedience (it was God's ordinance) and gratitude (all God had done for them). It is good to set aside special times to meditate on the work of the Lord in your life.

The things that are (11–12). In spite of all that God did for His people, they would not listen to His Word or do His will. One of God's most painful judgments is to permit you to have your own way. For a time, you enjoy it; then you learn how much you have missed.

The things that might have been (13–16). Had they obeyed, they would have experienced victory instead of defeat, fullness instead of emptiness, and the best instead of the worst. They could have looked back with rejoicing, but instead they had to remember with regret.

The things that might have been *will be* if *today* you let the Master have His way.

PSALM 82

The throne in heaven (1–4). The Lord stands as Judge and indicts the human judges for their failure to defend the poor and needy and condemn the wicked. Their partiality made a farce out of the legal system God ordained for Israel (Lev. 19:15; Prov. 24:23–25). What does He think of our judicial system today?

The foundations on earth (5). The foundations for peace and order in society are righteousness and justice (Pss. 89:14; 97:2). Whether in the home, church, or government, abandoning righteousness and justice makes the very foundations tremble (Ps. 11:3) and brings darkness where there should be light.

The graves under the earth (6–8). The human judges are called “gods” because the Hebrew word *elohim* means “mighty ones.” (It is also one of the names for God.) Leadership is a serious thing, for leaders stand in the place of God and will one day answer to Him. The selfish judges may have their days of pleasure, but one day they will die, and then what? The judges will be judged righteously by the Judge of all the earth, and there will be no escape.

PSALM 83

Asaph was perplexed (vv. 1–8). Israel was in danger, but God was silent and inactive. The nations were noisily forming a military confederacy against the Jews, but God was speechless and seemingly doing nothing. The enemy wanted to destroy the nation (v. 4) and take the land (v. 12), and apparently God was going to let them do it.

So, Asaph prayed (vv. 9–18) and reminded God of what He did to Israel's enemies during the days of the judges (vv. 9–12). Then he shifted from history to nature and asked God to send a storm to wipe them out (vv. 13–15).

Asaph had a purpose in mind—not just the safety of Israel but the glory of the Lord (vv. 16–18). Some of the enemy soldiers might even trust in the God of Israel! It was not important that Israel's name be preserved (v. 4), but it was important that God's name be glorified.

When it seems that God is saying and doing nothing, rest assured that He is working on your behalf. He is not as noisy as the enemy, but He is more powerful; *and He will win.*

PSALM 84

The Jews were required to go to Jerusalem three times each year, to celebrate Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles. The author of this psalm was unable to join the pilgrimage, even though his soul yearned to be there. Life has its disappointments, but the three beatitudes in this psalm tell you how to handle them.

The blessing of dwelling (4). Perhaps the priests and Levites took for granted their privilege of dwelling in the courts of the Lord, but the psalmist did not. God's altars were to him what a nest was to a bird, a place of safety and satisfaction. Abiding in the Lord is not a matter of geography, for you can worship Him and love Him wherever you are. When life disappoints you, abide in Him.

The blessing of desiring (5). What is in your heart is what counts. He would rather serve in the temple than be served anywhere else. When your desires are godly, the Lord will

give you all you need. When life disappoints you, be sure your heart's desires are pleasing to God.

The blessing of depending (12). God's pilgrims go "from strength to strength" and "from faith to faith" (Rom. 1:17). As you trust the Lord, He gives "grace and glory," for He is your sun (provision) and shield (protection). He gives you all you need on the pilgrimage of life. When life disappoints you, depend on the Lord for what you really need.

PSALM 85

Restoration (1-3). We do not know from what crisis the Lord had delivered His people; perhaps it was the captivity in Babylon. His wrath had ended, their sins were forgiven, and they had come home again. In times of divine chastening, rest on Psalm 30:5.

Revival (4-7). When the refugees got back to the land, life was difficult, and they were ready to give up. God had forgiven their sins, but that did not make life a paradise. They wanted new life from God so they could rejoice in Him. New beginnings should lead to experiences of new life.

“It is no use to pray for the old days; stand square where you are and make the present better than any past has been. Base all on your relationship to God and go forward, and presently you will find that what is emerging is infinitely better than the past ever was.”

Oswald Chambers

Responsibility (8-13). God forgives us that we might fear and serve Him (Ps. 130:4). You must hear and obey His Word and trust Him to send the needed increase. Mercy and truth met in His passion when Jesus died for the sin of the world. Righteousness and peace meet in His person: King of righteousness and King of peace (Heb. 7:1-3).

God's chastening is for your good, and He is with you when it is ended. He will help you make a fresh new start for His glory.

PSALM 86

"Preserve my life" (1-10). David was in trouble again. As he always did, he turned to the Lord for help, and he presented some reasons why God should answer him. God was *his* God, and he was God's servant. God was merciful, and he needed mercy. He wanted God alone to be glorified in the victory. God is good and great and ready to help.

"Unite my heart" (11-13). A divided heart leads only to instability (James 1:5-8), because you cannot serve two masters (Matt. 6:22-24). With a single heart, fear the Lord, learn from the Lord, obey the Lord, and praise His name.

"Strengthen my hand" (14-17). David's strength and experience were inadequate to face the foe; he needed the strength of the Lord. David knew his theology (v. 15; Exod. 34:6; Neh. 9:17), and that helped him in his praying. The better you know God, the better you can approach Him with your needs.

PSALM 87

The earthly Mount Zion is a figure of the heavenly Zion, the city of God and God's redeemed people (Gal. 4:21-31; Heb. 12:18-24). As you ponder this psalm, take inventory of your spiritual life.

On what are you building (1-3)? Are you building your life on God's foundation (1 Cor. 3:11)? "Salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22), for God's gracious work in this world came through Israel (Gen. 12:1-3). Your Bible is a Jewish book, and the Savior came from the tribe of Judah. When the church was born, the Holy Spirit came on Jewish believers in the temple in Jerusalem. To obey Him is to build on an unfailing foundation (Matt. 7:21-29).

Where is your citizenship (4-6)? Some people like to boast about the place of their birth, but the "once-born" do not have the blessings of the "twice-born." Through faith in Christ, God's children are enrolled in the heavenly Zion (Luke 10:20; Phil. 3:20; 4:3)—and will live with the Father forever.

What are your joys (7)? Jerusalem is one of the few ancient cities that is not built by a river. The psalmist found all his joys in Jerusalem, and he wanted nothing more. By faith, you can drink of the river of His pleasures (Pss. 36:8; 46:4) and be satisfied.

“What man needs is not a boost from below but a birth from above.”

Vance Havner

PSALM 88

This is one of the few psalms that does not end on a note of glorious victory. When Heman wrote it, he was suffering greatly, and God had not given him relief. *But he kept on praying and trusting God* (vv. 1–2, 9, 13).

The next time you want to say, “Nobody knows how I feel!” take time to read this psalm. How did Heman feel? Like a dead man buried in a dark pit. Like a drowning man sinking under cold waves and billows. Like a defiled man watching everybody run away and leave him alone. Most of all, he felt like a doomed man whom God had forsaken.

But Heman did not give up. Instead, he looked by faith to God, the God of wonders, loving-kindness, and faithfulness (vv. 10–12). He cried out to God and told Him just how he felt. Your feelings may change, but God never changes. You can trust Him even in the dark, even when you seem to be drowning.

God knows how you feel (Heb. 4:14–16) and is working out His purposes for you. The final verses of your “psalm” have not been written yet, but God knows what they are, so wait for Him. They are worth waiting for!

PSALM 89

God made a covenant with David that he would always have a descendant on his throne and that the Davidic line

would rule forever (2 Sam. 7). But Ethan the Ezrahite had a problem. One of the Davidic kings had been defeated in war and had lost his throne (vv. 38–45). It seemed to Ethan that God had broken His covenant (vv. 3, 28, 34, 39) and that God was not faithful to His people.

Faithfulness is a key word in this psalm (vv. 1, 2, 5, 8, 24, 33). God's faithfulness is seen from generation to generation (vv. 1–4), among His people (vv. 5–10), in creation (vv. 11–13), among the nations (vv. 14–18), and toward David and his family (vv. 19–37). Ethan knew all of this because he knew the Scriptures, but recent events seemed to deny the truthfulness of the covenant and the faithfulness of the Lord.

Ethan's problem was caused by spiritual shortsightedness. The ultimate fulfillment of the Davidic covenant is in Jesus Christ, the Son of David (Matt. 1:1), and He will reign forever (Luke 1:26–33). God's faithfulness does not fail!

When Jeremiah viewed the destruction of Jerusalem, he may have felt as Ethan did when the king was defeated and dethroned. Instead of questioning God's faithfulness, Jeremiah reaffirmed it: "Great is Your faithfulness" (Lam. 3:23). Never judge God's faithfulness on the basis of what you see or how you feel. His promises do not fail (2 Cor. 1:18–20).

PSALM 90

The somber tone of this psalm suggests that Moses may have written it when the nation rebelled in unbelief at Kadesh Barnea (Num. 13–14). God announced that everybody twenty years old and older would die within the next forty years. No wonder Moses prayed, "So teach us to number our days" (v. 12).

We number our years, but it is wiser to number our days, for we live a day at a time. Life is brief, like the changing of the guard, or taking a nap, or mowing the lawn (vv. 3–6). In the camp of Israel, a twenty-year-old would not live beyond sixty, and the older people would never make it to eighty (v. 10). It was a funeral march for forty long years!

In the light of eternity (vv. 1–4), life is brief—no matter how long you live. You need God's help to use your days wisely (v. 12) and joyfully (vv. 14–15). There is real satisfaction in doing God's will (v. 14; 1 John 2:17), revealing God's glory (v. 16)

and growing in God's beauty (v. 17). In spite of the burdens of life and the brevity of life, *life is worth living when you trust the Lord.*

The Land of the Living

Charles Spurgeon told about a man who said to a dying believer, "Farewell, friend! I shall never see you again in the land of the living!" The dying Christian replied, "I shall see you again in the land of the living where I am going. This is the land of the dying!"

PSALM 91

What a relief to turn to this psalm and move out of the shadows into the sunshine! In light of the sobering admonitions of Psalm 90, we appreciate even more the sublime assurances of Psalm 91.

The theme is *security*: God preserves those who abide in Him and love Him. These promises are not for people who run to the Lord only in times of danger but for those who *dwell* in His presence (v. 1) and make the Holy of Holies their *habitation* (v. 9).

What are the dangers we face? Snares and pestilences (v. 3), arrows (v. 5), plagues (v. 10), stones (vv. 11-12), and lions and snakes (v. 13; perhaps referring to Satan). You can easily give the modern equivalents for these ancient perils that Jewish travelers faced.

The abiding life (vv. 1-4) produces the assuring life (vv. 5-13), the life without fear, which leads to the abounding life (vv. 14-16), the life of victory and peace. The safest place in the world is under the shadow of the Almighty.

PSALM 92

It is good to thank the Lord *for every day He gives you* (vv. 1-4). As the day begins, you can look ahead by faith and

praise Him for His loving-kindness. As the day ends, you can look back and praise Him for His faithfulness.

It is good to thank the Lord *that you are part of what is eternal* (vv. 5–9). You cannot understand eternity, but you can have eternal life through faith in Christ; and you can live for what is eternal (1 John 2:17). Ponder 1 Corinthians 15:58.

It is even good to thank the Lord *for old age* (vv. 10–15). In old age, those who live for Christ become fresh (v. 10), flourishing (vv. 12–13), fruitful (v. 14), and faithful (v. 15). Instead of complaining, they are praising the Lord and witnessing for Him.

“It does not pay to get sour as you get old. I pity a man who lives in the past. He lives on stale manna. He gets stunted.”

D. L. Moody

PSALM 93

When the floods are rising (v. 3), lay hold of three anchors that will steady you.

God's throne (1–4). No matter what may come to you today, “the LORD reigns!” God is sovereign and everything is under control. His majestic throne is strong, established, and everlasting. His throne is above the floods, but He is with you in your trials and will see you through (Isa. 43:1–2).

God's testimonies (5a). You can trust the Word of God because it never fails (Josh. 21:45; 23:14). Cling to His testimonies (Ps. 119:31) and withstand the floods by faith.

God's temple (5b). God's throne was the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies (Ps. 99:1), and there His glory rested. Satan himself cannot dethrone our Lord, and the men who attempt it are attempting vanity (Ps. 2:1–3). When the storms come and the floods rise, you can experience peace, for “the LORD is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him” (Hab. 2:20).

PSALM 94

God alone can judge and punish the wicked (vv. 1-3), but God's people must stand up and be counted in the battle for truth (v. 16). It is easier to be a spectator or an advisor than to be a soldier. When you enter the battle against evil, rely on God.

God knows all about the enemy (1-11). He hears their insolent speech, He sees their wicked deeds, and He will eventually bring them to judgment. The Captain of your salvation will not be caught off guard!

God will teach you what to do (12-15). The basic "Handbook for Battle" is the Word of God, and God will teach you what you need to know. Gideon was an ordinary farmer when God called him, and yet he became a mighty warrior because he let God teach him (Judg. 6-7). Even though he was hiding from the enemy, God called him a "mighty man of valor" (Judg. 6:11-12).

God will help you fight (16-23). God is for you if you are against what He is against. When you fight, He will help you. If you slip, He will hold you. If you worry, He will comfort you, and if you are attacked, He will defend you.

Who is on the Lord's side? Are you?

PSALM 95

God is great (1-7a)! This is a call to jubilant worship, not just participation in services as usual. He invites us to "shout joyfully" and to "kneel before the LORD." Why? Because God is great! He is a great Creator and a great King, and we are privileged to be His people.

God is grieved (7b-11). The opposite of a worshiping heart that pleases the Lord is a hard heart that grieves the Lord. Imagine seeing God's wonders and not submitting gladly to Him! The unbelieving Jews paid a high price for their sin: they died in the wilderness and never entered the Promised Land (Heb. 3-4).

Do you want to enjoy your life of faith? Then take time to see the greatness of God and to praise Him. Do you want to inherit all that God has planned for you in this life? Then give

yourself to worship and praise. A hard heart leads to a hard life, so keep your heart tender before God.

PSALM 96

In this invitation to worship the Lord, you are given three admonitions.

Sing to the Lord (1–6). Sing a *new song* because you have had a new experience with Him. Sing a *worship hymn* because God is glorious (v. 3) and great (vv. 4–5). Sing a *gospel song* because the nations need to hear the good news of salvation. Sing a *song of victory* and reveal the strength of the Lord. Sing a *song of devotion* and reveal the beauty of the Lord.

Give to the Lord (7–10). Give Him glory with your lips and heart, and give Him offerings with your hands. God does not need your gifts (Acts 17:24–25), but you need to bring your gifts to God. He deserves the best (Mal. 1:6–14).

Look for the Lord (11–13). All nature is eagerly anticipating the Lord's return, for then creation will be set free (Rom. 8:18–25). The oppressed people will be vindicated, and sinners will be judged when Jesus Christ comes to reign. God's people shall reign with Christ and then worship Him perfectly. Hallelujah!

PSALM 97

"The LORD reigns!" Not "the LORD *will* reign," but "the LORD reigns!" Right now! In another psalm the Lord declared, "I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion" (Ps. 2:6). We are children of the King.

Let the earth be glad (1–6). You may not see much righteousness and justice in the world today, but that does not mean God has been dethroned. For reasons we do not fully understand, God permits evil men to exploit the earth and its people, but one day He will come in power and glory and set things right.

Let Israel be glad (7–9). Israel has played the key part in God's gracious plan of salvation, witnessing the true God, passing the Bible on to us, and giving us the Savior. The nation has suffered much, but one day her Messiah King will

come in glory and fulfill the promises made to the patriarchs.

Let the righteous be glad (10–12). This group includes all of God's people, sinners declared righteous through faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:21–4:8). They love the Lord and rejoice in the Lord. If you are yielded to the King, you have good reason to be glad, so joyfully tell the world, "The Lord reigns!"

"Rejoice, the Lord Is King!"

*Rejoice, the Lord is King!
Your Lord and King adore;
Mortals, give thanks and sing,
And triumph evermore.*

*Jesus the Saviour reigns,
The God of truth and love;
When He had purged our stains
He took His seat above.*

*He sits at God's right hand
Till all His foes submit,
And bow to His command,
And fall beneath His feet.*

*Rejoice in glorious hope;
Jesus the Judge shall come,
And take His servants up
To their eternal home.*

*Lift up your heart, lift up your voice,
Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!*

Charles Wesley

PSALM 98

Why should we praise the Lord? Because of His redemption (v. 1), the revelation of His righteousness (v. 2), and the remembrance of His mercy (v. 3). That should keep you busy singing His praises for a long time!

How should we praise the Lord? With a joyful shout and song (v. 4), and with musical instruments skillfully played to please Him (vv. 5–6). Let voices and instruments join in praising the Lord! Not religious entertainment but the joyful expression of praise to God.

Who should praise the Lord? Everybody in the world—and all the world of nature (vv. 7–9). The anticipation of His coming excites creation, and you should be a part of their excitement. Joy to the world—the Lord has come!

A New Song

The psalmist often exhorts us to “sing a new song” (Pss. 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1). The word translated “new” means “fresh, new in quality.” The song may be an old one, but our growth in the Lord and our new experiences of His grace enable us to sing an old song with fresh new meaning and blessing. This explains why the Lord allows us to go through trials. He is tuning us up to praise Him in a new way!

PSALM 99

“He is holy” (vv. 3, 5, 9), and He is high (v. 2); therefore, give God the honor due Him.

Fear Him (1–3). The greatness of God makes the earth

shake, and it should make the people tremble (Isa. 64:1-5). Even the demons tremble when they think of God (James 2:19). It is frightening to hear how carelessly many people speak *about* God or to God. It is even more frightening to see how carelessly people live, as though God will never require an accounting from them.

Exalt Him (4-5). The Lord is exalted in strength, righteousness, and holiness. One way to exalt Him is by your worship, but you must back that up by a consistent walk. Christ should be magnified in your body so that the lost around you may realize how great He is (1 Cor. 6:19-20; Phil. 1:19-26).

Call on Him (6-9). Three great men of prayer are mentioned to encourage you in your praying. They were not perfect, but they heard God's word, obeyed it, and God answered when they called. The Word of God and prayer must always go together (John 15:7; Acts 6:4), and so must prayer and obedience (Ps. 66:18).

PSALM 100

The hymn "Old Hundredth" ("All People That on Earth Do Dwell") is based on this psalm, as is the familiar "Doxology." Thanking the Lord is something we must do with our lives as well as with our lips. How shall we do it?

By serving (2). "Enter to worship—depart to serve" should be written clearly above the door to the church sanctuary. Too many people serve themselves and not the Lord, and too often we do not serve the Lord "with gladness." The Lord loves a cheerful servant.

By submitting (3). As creatures, we submit to the Creator who made us. As sheep, we submit to the Shepherd who died for us and now leads us in His paths. He not only made us, but *He is making us* as we yield to Him (Eph. 2:10). Submission means fulfillment.

By sacrificing (4-5). As priests, we are privileged to offer spiritual sacrifices to the Lord (1 Pet. 2:5). They include our songs of praise (Heb. 13:15), good works (Heb. 13:16), and material gifts (Phil. 4:15-18). Because of who He is (v. 5) and what He does for us, He is certainly worthy of our joyful thanks.

"Old Hundredth"

*All people that on earth do dwell,
Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice;
Him serve with mirth, His praise forth tell;
Come ye before Him and rejoice.*

*Know that the Lord is God indeed;
Without our aid He did us make;
We are His folk, He does us feed;
And for His sheep He doth us take.*

*O enter then His gates with praise,
Approach with joy His courts unto;
Praise, laud and bless His name always,
For it is seemly so to do.*

*For why? The Lord our God is good,
His mercy is forever sure;
His truth at all times firmly stood,
And shall from age to age endure.*

William Kethe

(Published 1560-61)

PSALM 101

Determination and dedication characterize this psalm as David says "I will" nine times and "shall" six times. He wanted a perfect (blameless) heart (v. 2), not a perverse (twisted) heart (v. 4) or a proud heart (v. 5). To be "perfect" before the Lord does not mean to be sinless; it means to be sincere and without pretense. John called it "walking in the light" (1 John 1:5-10).

David wanted justice in the land and the city (v. 8), just as we do today. But civic righteousness must begin in the heart and in the home (vv. 2, 7). Yes, we need honest people enforcing just laws, but we also need godly people living holy lives, starting at home.

We must be careful what we look at (v. 3) and listen to (v. 5), and with whom we fellowship (vv. 6-7). In a world full of illusion, we must avoid lies and must walk in God's wisdom (vv. 7, 2). Unlike David, we do not have authority to execute judgment on the wicked. But if our hearts and homes are what God wants them to be, our influence will be felt in the city and the nation.

“Strength of character may be acquired at work, but beauty of character is learned at home. There the affections are trained. There the gentle life reaches us, the true heaven life. In one word, the family circle is the supreme conductor of Christianity.”

Phillips Brooks

PSALM 102

God enjoys endless years, but we endure shortened days (vv. 23-24), troubled days (v. 2), days that disappear like smoke, grass, and a shadow (vv. 3, 4, 11). We sit alone like birds in a desert and dying patients in a hospital (vv. 5-9). How depressing!

Do you ever have days like that? If you do, beware. Looking at yourself and your feelings will only make things worse. Do what the writer of this penitential psalm did: look by faith to the Lord. Things will be different when you look from yourself to God and say, “But You.”

“But You shall endure” (12-22). If you know Jesus Christ by faith, you possess eternal life (1 John 5:11-13). So, living in a

world of death and decay need not be a threat to you because you will live forever with the Lord (1 Thess. 4:13-18).

"But You are the same" (25-28). As you grow older, you may find yourself resisting change. Loved ones move away or die, your body weakens, the world changes, and it is easy to become bitter and afraid. But God does not change (Heb. 13:5-8), and He is your Friend and Guide to the very end (Ps. 73:24).

The temporary things will change, but the things eternal will last (2 Cor. 4:11-18).

"Abide with Me"

*Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;
Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away;
Change and decay in all around I see;
O Thou who changest not, abide with me.*

*I fear no foe, with Thee at hand to bless;
Ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness.
Where is death's sting? where, grave, thy victory?
I triumph still, if Thou abide with me.*

Henry Francis Lyte

PSALM 103

David makes no requests in this psalm. All he does is praise the Lord for three wonderful blessings, which he names in verses 3-5 and then explains in the rest of the psalm.

Forgiveness (3, 10-14). Forgiveness is like healing when you are sick (1 Pet. 2:24), relief when you are burdened (vv. 11-12; Lev. 16:20-22; John 1:29), and reconciliation when you have hurt someone (vv. 13-14). All of this comes because Jesus died for your sins on the cross and you have trusted Him.

Redemption (4, 6-9). God redeemed the nation from bondage and from difficulties they faced on their journey to Ca-

naan. He frees us that He might be our Master and care for us forever. When He crowns us, He transforms slaves into kings (Rom. 5:17). What grace!

Satisfaction (5, 15–18). Man is frail and temporary, but believers enjoy “eternal youth” and spiritual renewal. David compares it to the eagle that looks old but still soars upward with new strength (Isa. 40:31).

You belong to the King who rules over everything (v. 19)! The angels praise Him (vv. 20–22), so why not join in their worship?

Renewal

Just as God renews the face of the earth and brings it new life and beauty (Ps. 104:30), so He can renew your life if you will let Him. It begins with a renewed mind (Rom. 12:1–2) as you permit the Spirit to teach you God’s Word (Eph. 4:23; Col. 3:10). Wait before the Lord in worship, and He will renew strength (Isa. 40:31). When you walk by faith, you have a constant experience of renewal in spite of the changes of life (2 Cor. 4:16–18). There is always something new to enjoy when you “walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4).

PSALM 104

Psalm 104 praises God for His fullness as Creator, Psalm 105 for His faithfulness as Redeemer, and Psalm 106 for His forgiveness as Savior of His people. How easy it is to take for granted the world that God created! We see the blemishes but not the blessings, and we forget what kind of world God gave us.

It is a place of *greatness* (vv. 1–9), not the greatness of man

but the greatness of God. The psalmist compared creation to the building of a house: laying the foundations, putting up the beams, hanging the curtains, and taking care of the water system. Only a great and wise God could make this kind of world.

It is a place of *goodness* (vv. 10–30). He provides life, water, food and homes for man and beast and also the birds, and He sees to it they are cared for. Everything in creation is God's gift to us to enjoy (1 Tim. 6:17).

It is a place of *gladness* (vv. 31–35). God rejoices over creation (v. 31), and we should be "glad in the LORD" (v. 34). Creation is a window through which we see God, not a mirror in which we see ourselves; and the more we see Him, the happier we should be. Only this will make us good stewards of God's creation.

"This Is My Father's World"

*This is my Father's world,
 Oh, let me ne'er forget
 That though the wrong seems oft so strong,
 God is the ruler yet.
 This is my Father's world;
 Why should my heart be sad?
 The Lord is king; let the heavens ring.
 God reigns; let the earth be glad.*

Maltbie D. Babcock

PSALM 105

The previous psalm extols the Creator, while this one exalts the Redeemer and His providential care for His people, Israel.

His deeds (1–6). When you read the history of Israel, you are encouraged by God's mighty and marvelous deeds

wrought for His needy people (Rom. 15:4). You want to praise Him, rejoice in Him, seek Him, and tell others about Him.

His covenant (7-15). God bound Himself by an oath to only one nation, Israel. He gave His promise to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3) and then reaffirmed it to his descendants. The covenant was their assurance that they would inherit the land. God's new covenant people have the assurance that their future inheritance is secure (Matt. 26:26-29; Heb. 8:6-13).

His servants (16-45). God sent Joseph to Egypt to preserve Jacob's family so they could become a nation. He sent Moses to Egypt to deliver His people. He sent Aaron to assist Moses and serve as high priest for a sinful people. God always has a man or woman ready to send when a job must be done. He waits to hear you say, "Here am I! Send me!" (Isa. 6:8).

PSALM 106

In light of God's goodness to Israel, you would have expected the nation to submit to Him and serve Him gratefully. Instead, they sinned and had to be disciplined many times. Before you judge them, however, consider whether you may be guilty of some of the same sins they committed.

God delivered Israel from Egypt, but they soon forgot His mercy and ignored His counsel (vv. 6-23). He gave them manna, and they lusted for meat. They criticized their leaders. They worshiped a golden idol and would have been destroyed had Moses not interceded for them.

They came to the border of the Promised Land and refused to go in (vv. 24-27). While wandering in the wilderness, they compromised with the heathen nations (vv. 28-31). Their stubborn attitude even made Moses sin (vv. 32-33). Once in the land, they compromised with the wicked nations, and God had to chasten them repeatedly (vv. 34-43).

Were it not for His covenant, God would have destroyed them. But He forgave them and allowed them to have many new beginnings. Finally He had to disperse them among the Gentiles (v. 47).

Paul gives you most of the story in 1 Corinthians 10:1-13. Take it to heart!

PSALM 107

How easy it is to take God's mercy for granted! Ingratitude seems to be natural to the sinful human heart (vv. 8, 15, 21, 31; Rom. 1:21ff.). Here are four pictures of God's mercy toward sinners and how they responded.

Travelers (4-9). Being lost in the wilderness without food or drink would be a frightful experience. God not only saved them but led them to the safety of the city. Did they take time to thank Him?

Prisoners (10-16). They were in prison because they had rebelled against God's will, so they deserved to suffer. But when they cried out to God, He heard them and set them free. Did they take time to thank Him?

Sufferers (17-22). We move from the prison to the hospital where people were dying because of their foolish way of life. They had "made their own bed" and should lie in it, but God mercifully healed them. Did they take time to show their appreciation?

Sailors (23-32). Dangers on the water usually exceed dangers on the land, for where can you go for help in the midst of a violent storm? You can only look up, which is what they did, and the Lord rescued them. He calmed the storm, and He brought them to their desired destination (John 6:15-21).

Farmers (33-38). Only God can send the rain that turns the wilderness into a garden, and only God can make the cattle multiply. We eat and are full, but do we take time to thank the Lord for giving us food (Deut. 6:10-13)? Be wise and understand the loving-kindness of the Lord.

PSALM 108

This psalm is adapted from Psalm 57:7-11 (vv. 1-5) and Psalm 60:5-12 (vv. 6-13). It is the song of a warrior, and in it, David makes three affirmations.

"I will praise" (1-6). A steadfast heart is a singing heart because confidence in God gives you something to sing about. David arose early in the morning to sing to the Lord. Worship is good preparation for warfare.

"I will listen" (7-9). God heard the voice of David, and then

David listened to the voice of God. It was a word of assurance as the king went out to battle: "All nations are mine, and I can do with them as I please."

"I will conquer" (10–13). God leads us into the battle, helps us capture the enemy's strongholds, and gives us the victory. Verse 13 is David's version of Philippians 4:13. It was true for him, and it is true for you today.

PSALM 109

When people have lied about you, spoken hatefully to you, and rewarded you evil for good, you would benefit from reading this psalm. When your heart is wounded within (v. 22) and there is no way to set the record straight, take it to the Lord and tell Him how you feel.

Verses 5–20 record another of King David's "imprecatory prayers." (See the comments on Ps. 58.) He asks God to judge the man who lied about him (vv. 6–8) and also to judge the man's children (vv. 9–13). He even asks that the man's ancestors' sins come up before God for judgment (vv. 14–16), and that the liar reap just what he has sown (vv. 18–20).

When you feel that way, give the Lord the opportunity to heal your wounded heart (Ps. 147:3). No matter how God deals with your enemies, be sure you praise Him. And remember, He is long-suffering with sinners—including you! The best way to get rid of an enemy is to leave him or her with the Lord.

PSALM 110

This psalm is quoted in the New Testament more than any other one. It was quoted by Jesus (Matt. 22:41–46) and Peter (Acts 2:32–36), and the writer of Hebrews quoted it (or alluded to it) many times.

The Lord (1). Jesus focused on the real issue when He asked, "If Messiah is David's Son, how can Messiah be David's Lord?" There is only one answer: Messiah must come as a man *through the family of David*. Messiah is both eternal God and man, divine and human. He is seated in the place of glory and authority.

The King (2–3). This is a picture of victory over Messiah's enemies. The final victory has not yet been won, but He still

rules in the midst of His enemies. Are you one of His volunteers in the battle against sin?

The Priest (4). Hebrews 7–10 expounds this verse, and the background for it is in Genesis 14. Melchizedek and Jesus Christ are the only king-priests God has accepted. As King, Jesus can deal with the circumstances around you; as Priest, He can help with the feelings and weaknesses within you.

The Judge (5–7). A day of wrath is coming when the Lord Jesus will deal with His enemies once and for all (Rev. 19:11–20:15). He will be victorious and His head lifted up in exaltation.

If you know Him as God's Son and your High Priest, obey Him as your King, and seek to win others before He comes as Judge.

PSALM 111

Psalm 111 is for people who study. It explains how to be a student who pleases the Lord and grows in understanding of truth.

Start with worship (1). The lower you bow before the Lord, the more He will instruct you. Go right to the Source!

See God in His works (2–6). Whether it is science or history, you are examining God's works in this world. His works are great and glorious, revealing His power and wisdom. To see the creation but ignore the Creator is to move into idolatry and sin (Rom. 1:18ff.).

“All men naturally desire to know, but what does knowledge avail without the fear of God?”

Thomas à Kempis

See God in His Word (7–9). The Word of God and the book of nature do not contradict each other, for the same Author wrote them. The theories of scholars come and go, but God's Word stands forever.

Obey what God teaches you (10). The search into truth is

not simply an academic endeavor of the mind; it must involve your whole person. If you are willing to *do* God's truth, He will teach you (John 7:17). F. W. Robertson said, "Obedience is the organ of spiritual knowledge."

All truth is God's truth. If you love truth, learn truth, and live truth, the truth will set you free (John 8:31-32).

PSALM 112

"Blessed is the man who fears the LORD," says verse 1; and verses 7-8 declare, "He will not be afraid." When you fear the Lord, you need not fear anything else. The fear of God is the fear that conquers fear.

This applies to fears about your family (v. 2) and your finances (v. 3), and even fear of the dark (v. 4). If you dread making decisions, the Lord will help you (vv. 5-6). When you fear the Lord, you need not fear bad news (vv. 7-8) because you know He is in control of all things (Rom. 8:28).

You need not be afraid to give because God will use your gifts and reward you (v. 9). And do not be alarmed at your enemies; God will take care of them as well (v. 10).

Isaiah proclaimed, "The LORD of hosts. . . Let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread" (Isa. 8:13).

PSALM 113

A concise manual of worship is presented here.

Who should worship (1). "Servants of the LORD" includes all of God's people, for those who have trusted Him surely would want to live for Him.

When we worship (2). Start right now and keep on going! It is always time to praise the Lord. Make every breath a hymn of worship.

Where we worship (3). His name should be praised from east to west, all day long, no matter where we are. If you find yourself in a place where you cannot praise the Lord, maybe you do not belong there.

Why we worship (4-9). Because of who God is (vv. 4-6) and what God does (vv. 7-9). The better you know God, the more you will worship Him. The more you experience His grace in daily life, the more praise you will bring to Him.

If you have a problem praising the Lord from sunup to sundown, what will you do for all eternity?

***Praise
the Lord!***

Mary's joyful song of praise (Luke 1:46-55) echoes Psalm 113:7-9. God's grace makes kings out of beggars and joyful mothers out of the barren. Praise the Lord!

PSALM 114

This beautiful poem celebrates the exodus of Israel from Egypt. The sea, the river, the mountains, and the hills all made way for the people of God as they marched in triumph. Even the rocks became Israel's servants and gave them water to drink.

God brings us out (v. 1), takes us through (v. 3), and leads us over (v. 4). When you are following Him, no obstacle can keep you from the goal He has set for you, except your sin and unbelief.

When you are in the will of God, all of creation works for you to accomplish God's purposes. You are God's sanctuary (1 Cor. 6:19-20); let Him have dominion in your life (v. 2).

PSALM 115

The message of this psalm raises some important questions for you to answer.

"Where is your God?" Gentiles visiting Jerusalem would notice the absence of idols. Back home, they could point to their gods and introduce you to the craftsman who made them. Is your God in heaven, ruling over all? Are you trusting something less than God?

"What is your God like?" Be careful! You become like the god you worship (v. 8). The living God can see you, hear your prayers, walk with you and help you. He can speak to you from His Word.

“Do you praise your God?” He has blessed you; have you blessed Him? He has given you promises; do you trust Him? He is the *living* God; does your life glorify Him?

The Living God

The Bible uses human illustrations to explain divine attributes. God is spirit and does not have a body, but He can see you, hear you, and walk with you. After all, we can do those things, and we are made in the image of God. If we fail to trust the Lord and worship Him, we might just as well worship a dead idol! Do you have living faith in the living God?

The Good Hand of Our God

When God wanted to create a world, He merely had to use His fingers (Ps. 8:3). To save lost sinners, He had to bare His arm (Isa. 53:1). When He wants to accomplish a task, He uses His mighty hand (Ezra 7:6, 9, 28; Neh. 2:8).

PSALM 116

From danger to deliverance. The psalmist almost died (v. 3), possibly because people lied to him (v. 11). But when he cried out to the Lord, the Lord saved him (v. 8). The death of a believer is precious to the Lord; He will not permit it to be merely an accident (v. 15). This does not mean that God *enjoys* the death of one of His own. Rather, it means that He values His own so much that He makes death an appointment. It is a part of a loving plan (Pss. 31:15; 139:16).

From agitation to rest. He was surrounded by the pains of death and was worried about his future, but the Lord gave him rest (v. 7).

From prayer to praise. Praise is the logical response when God has answered prayer and seen you through your difficulties. Note these assertions: “I will walk” (v. 9); “I will offer . . . the sacrifice of thanksgiving” (v. 17); “I will pay my vows” (v. 18); and “I will call upon Him as long as I live” (v. 2).

PSALM 117

This short psalm is about a big subject: helping all the nations to praise the Lord. God called Israel to be a blessing to all the nations of the world (Gen. 12:1–3), just as He has called His church to take the gospel to the whole world (Matt. 28:18–20).

The nations are worshiping false gods, so what do we tell them about the true God? That His mercy is great and His truth is enduring. What He does is merciful and what He says is dependable.

God blesses you so that you might be a blessing to others, not only the people you see every day but people you will never see until you get to heaven. Are you helping the peoples of the world learn about Jesus?

“The Spirit of Christ is the spirit of missions, and the nearer we get to Him the more intensely missionary we must become.”

Henry Martyn

PSALM 118

The Jewish people sing Psalms 113 to 118 at Passover, so this is one of the songs that Jesus sang before He went to the Garden to pray (Matt. 26:30). If you knew you were going to be executed unjustly, would you be able to sing praises to the Lord?

This is also a messianic psalm. The crowds shouted verses 25–26 as Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday (Matt. 21:9), and Jesus quoted verses 22–23 in His debate with the religious leaders (Matt. 21:33–46).

But it is also a song of praise, thanking God for deliverance from a difficult situation (vv. 10–14). The name of the Lord (vv. 10–12) and the hand of the Lord (vv. 15–16) can give you the victory you need. When you are hemmed in by the enemy (vv. 10–12), cry out to God and He will put you into “a broad place” (v. 5). He will open the gates for you and give you new freedom (vv. 19–20).

Claim verse 24 for every day that you live.

A Song of Faith

*“The LORD is my strength and song,
and He has become my salvation” (Ps.
118:14)—Israel sang those words when
they were delivered from the Egyptian
army at the Red Sea (Exod. 15:2). They
will sing those words again when God
gathers them from the nations and
restores them to their land (Isa. 11:10—
12:2). It is a song you may sing today by
faith.*

PSALM 119

The theme of this unique psalm is the Word of God. Every verse except five (84, 90, 121, 122, 132) refers to God’s Word, what it is and what it can do in your life if you let it. The arrangement is also unique. There are twenty-two sections of eight lines each, and the lines in each individual section begin with the same letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The first eight lines begin with *Aleph*, the next eight with *Beth*, and so on through all twenty-two letters. This may have been a device to help people memorize the psalm.

The writer had a great love for the Word of God and was

persecuted because he obeyed God and opposed sin. Most of the verses are either prayers for God's help or affirmations of the writer's faith in God's truth despite his difficulties. Meditating on this psalm ought to make you love and treasure the Word of God more and obey it more willingly.

Our approach will be to emphasize in each section one special ministry of the Word to your life.

The Word of God

Psalm 119 contains ten different names for the Word of God: word, law, saying, statutes, way, commandments, path, testimonies, precepts, and judgments. Each name indicates what the Word is and how we should respond to it. The writer pictured the Word of God as water (v. 9), treasure (vv. 14, 72, 127, 162), a companion and counselor (v. 24), a song (v. 54), honey (v. 103), light (vv. 105, 130), and a heritage (v. 111). Meditate on these pictures and see what they mean to your personal life of faith.

PSALM 119:1-8

Knowing and obeying God's Word will bring blessings to your life, some of which are given in the following sections. But if God is to bless you, you must sincerely seek the Lord and not just study the Bible. It is not facts in the head but truth in the heart that makes you grow in the Lord. Review Psalm 1.

PSALM 119:9-16

Here is the first blessing: God's Word can keep you clean. You must heed God's Word (v. 9) and hide God's Word in your

heart (v. 11). Campbell Morgan explained verse 11: "The best book, in the best place, for the best purpose." You must also rejoice in God's Word, delight in it and meditate on it. Meditation is to your inner person what digestion is to your body.

Heavenly Meditation

When you truly delight in the Word, you will have a desire to meditate on it and make it a part of your life. In Psalm 119, the writer connects "delight" and "meditation" (vv. 15-16, 23-24, 47-48, 77-78). Cultivate an appetite for the Word of God.

PSALM 119:17-24

God's Word will guide you on the pilgrim path of life. You are a stranger on the earth (v. 19; 1 Pet. 2:11), and you need a "road map" to help you know the way. That road map is the Bible. Ask God to open your eyes to the Word (v. 18) and keep your eyes on the way (v. 21; Prov. 3:1-6; 4:25-27). Let your Bible be your trusted counselor (v. 24).

PSALM 119:25-32

The Word of God brings you the blessing of life (v. 25) because it *has* life (Heb. 4:12), *imparts* life (1 Pet. 1:23-25), and *nourishes* life (1 Pet. 2:1-3). God's Word can revive and strengthen you (v. 28), even when you are in the dust. Nine times in this psalm the writer prayed for new life from the Lord (vv. 25, 37, 40, 88, 107, 149, 154, 156, 159). No need to stay in the dust when there is life for you in the Word of God!

PSALM 119:33-40

If you want real values, get them from the Word of God (v. 37). How tragic that so many people waste time, energy, and

money on things that amount to little or nothing (Isa. 55:2). The Hebrew word translated “worthless things” means “that which is nothing (vanity) because it is false.” The word was used of idols. What your heart covets (v. 36), your eyes will see, and then you will make wrong decisions. This is what happened to Lot (Gen. 13).

◆ ————— ◆
***Proper
 Values***

The psalmist had the right values. He would rather have God’s Word than food (v. 103), sleep (vv. 55, 62, 147-48), or money (vv. 14, 72, 127, 162).

◆ ————— ◆

PSALM 119:41-48

Freedom is another blessing God will give you if you love and obey His Word (v. 45). His Word is truth (v. 43), and the truth sets you free (John 8:32). Disobedience may seem like freedom, but it is really bondage (2 Pet. 2:19). When you obey God’s Word, you enjoy true freedom because His Word is “the law of liberty” (James 2:12). Law and liberty are not enemies; they are coworkers in your life in building character and bringing joy.

PSALM 119:49-56

The Word of God will bring *comfort* to your life if you will let it. The writer suffered affliction and persecution because of his faith, but the Word gave him comfort and hope. When the days are difficult and the nights are long, remember God’s promises and God’s name, and He will comfort you. (See also vv. 76, 82, 92.)

PSALM 119:57-64

If you are true to God’s Word, you will have friends who are worth having (v. 63). Solomon taught this same lesson in Proverbs 2 (see also Prov. 13:20). If you walk with the wicked, they

will bind you (v. 61), but if you walk with God's people, they will help you to enjoy life and liberty. People who love the Word will be glad to see you (v. 74) and will turn to you and help you (v. 79).

PSALM 119:65-72

The Word of God can encourage you in times of affliction (vv. 67, 71; see also vv. 50, 92). What life does to you depends upon what life finds in you. If the Word is in your mind and heart, affliction can bring out the best in you. If not, it may bring out the worst in you. The school of suffering never graduates any students, so ask God to teach you the lessons He wants you to learn.

PSALM 119:73-80

God made you and knows best how you should manage your life. The Bible is His how-to-do-it manual for making life work successfully (v. 73). It tells you how to use your body and mind, how to handle your time and money, and how to make right decisions. Obeying it can keep you from getting into trouble and hurting yourself and others. Do not wait until "all else fails" before you read the instructions! It may be too late!

PSALM 119:81-88

The Word of God will help you get victory over your enemies (vv. 84-87). When your eyes are failing and your soul is fainting, the Word will give you strength and comfort. When it looks like the end has come, God's Word helps you make a new beginning. Your worst enemy is on the inside, so let the Word work in your heart.

PSALM 119:89-96

If you trust God's Word, you will have a solid foundation in a world that offers you no stability. The Word of God is settled; nothing can change it or destroy it (v. 152; Matt. 24:35). God is faithful and His Word can be trusted. The same Word that

created the world (v. 90) and runs the world (v. 91) will also govern your life and make it secure.

PSALM 119:97-104

Those who love God's Word and obey it develop a practical wisdom for guiding their lives. It is dangerous to learn from your enemies (v. 98), and both your teachers and your elderly friends may not know what you need to know (vv. 99-100). Learn all you can from every good source, but let God, not man, be your teacher (John 14:26; 16:13-15).

“Everywhere among Conservatives we find persons who are Bible-taught but not Spirit-taught. They conceive truth to be something which they can grasp with the mind. If a man holds to the fundamentals of the Christian faith he is thought to possess divine truth. But it does not follow. There is no truth apart from the Spirit.”

A. W. Tozer

PSALM 119:105-12

In a dark world, God's Word can be your light (v. 105) to keep you from the traps and detours of the enemy (v. 110). God gives you the light you need a step at a time. If you want more light, you must obey what He says; then more light will come (John 7:17). God sends the light into your heart (v. 130) and gives you the wisdom you need.

PSALM 119:113-20

Doubleminded people are unstable people (James 1:8), and unstable people eventually fall. If you put God's Word first in

your life, it will hold you up and you will not fall (vv. 116-17; 2 Pet. 3:17-18; Jude 20-25). Cultivate a holy fear of the Lord and His Word (v. 120) and you will not be ashamed of your hope (v. 116).

PSALM 119:121-28

God's Word will assure you and enable you when you feel the oppression of the enemy (vv. 121-22). God's people are aliens in enemy territory, and only the Word can protect them from the lies of the oppressor. But you must accept *all* that God's Word says about *all things*; if you love the truth, you must also hate the false (v. 128).

PSALM 119:129-36

When you live by the Word of God, your life becomes wonderful because the Word of God is wonderful (v. 129). The Spirit shows you wonderful things in the Word (v. 18) and enables you to meditate on His wonderful works (v. 27). God transforms your mind and enables you to escape the dull conformity of the world (Rom. 12:1-2). His light shines within you (v. 130) and His face shines upon you (v. 135), so that you become a light in a dark world (Phil. 2:14-16).

PSALM 119:137-44

A key word of this section is *righteousness*. No matter how zealous we may be for God's truth (v. 139), we must also have His righteousness if we are going to succeed. The Word helps us practice righteousness in a sinful world. There is no substitute for integrity, which comes from loving the Word and obeying it.

PSALM 119:145-52

In this section, the psalmist is crying out to God in prayer and reminding us that the Word of God helps us to pray in the will of God. The Word of God and prayer must never be separated (Acts 6:4); if they are, we will get out of balance. The better we know the Word, the more effectively we will pray (John

15:7), and the more effectively we pray, the better we will learn the Word.

PSALM 119:153-60

One of the most difficult things in the life of faith is to be accused by Satan and ungodly people. "Plead my cause," prayed the psalmist (v. 154), and God defended him. When the enemy accuses you, let the Word of God assure you (Zech. 3), for the Word is truth (v. 160; John 17:17). If Satan tries to drag you into his court, read Romans 8:31-39.

PSALM 119:161-68

Knowing the Word of God and obeying it will bring joy to your heart, the kind of joy you would have if you found a buried treasure (v. 162) or inherited a fortune (v. 111). If material wealth is your goal, God's Word will not be a joy to you; but if you love the Word more than money (v. 127), you will have eternal spiritual treasures. Along with joy, you will experience love (vv. 163, 167), peace (v. 165), and hope (v. 166)—treasures money cannot buy.

PSALM 119:169-76

If you put the Word of God first in your life, you will have something to sing about (vv. 171, 172, 175). Spontaneously, you will find yourself *singing God's Word* and turning statutes into songs (v. 54)! When your heart delights in God's law (v. 174), your lips must declare God's praise (Matt. 12:34). After all, you talk about the things that you love. When God's Word fills your heart, the right words will come out of your mouth (Col. 3:16; 4:6).

"THE SONGS OF ASCENTS"

The next fifteen psalms are known as "the Songs of Ascents." They are thought to be the songs the Jewish pilgrims sang when they went up to Jerusalem for the feasts three times each year. Whoever made this selection chose four psalms by David and one by Solomon; the other ten are anonymous.

Honor His Word

You have been thinking about what the Word of God will do for you if you allow it to work in your life. Now it is time to discover what you must do with God's Word. You must do more than simply read it, although that is necessary. You should also love it (v. 97), treasure it (v. 72), learn it (vv. 26-27), memorize it (v. 11), meditate on it (v. 15), believe it (v. 42), and practice it (vv. 1-4). The way you treat your Bible is the way you treat your Lord, for it is His Word to your heart.

The Hebrew word translated "ascents" also means "degrees," and for this reason some scholars relate this special collection to King Hezekiah and his experience related in Isaiah 38. The fifteen psalms mark the fifteen years added to his life, and the ten anonymous psalms are a reminder of the shadow going back ten degrees.

The emphasis in this "hymnal within the hymnal" is on trusting the God of Mount Zion, even in the midst of suffering and trial. The writers describe both the trials and the triumphs of the people of God and reveal that God is with His people—no matter what the difficulty.

PSALM 120

Deliverance (1-4). The familiar rhyme "Sticks and stones will break my bones, but names will never hurt me" is not always true. Words *can* hurt us, and the psalmist felt them keenly. Only God can deliver you from lies and their destructive power, and only God can judge the liars. Just be sure you are "valiant for the truth" in your own life (Jer. 9:3).

Endurance (5-7). God did not change the psalmist's circumstances; he had to remain among people who hated him

and lied about him. But God gave him the endurance he needed to be faithful under pressure. God can easily change your circumstances, but He needs your help if He is to change you. Before God gives deliverance, He first must give endurance.

PSALM 121

God is your Helper (1-2). The God who made the hills is the God who gives you help. He is a God of the hills and the valleys (1 Kings 20:23-30), and His help is available to all who will call upon Him.

God is your Keeper (3-8). The pilgrims traveled together for fellowship and safety because the roads were dangerous. The dangers in modern society are just as great, if not greater. But God goes *before* you (vv. 3-4) and stays awake to guide you and guard your path. He is *next* to you (v. 5) and *over* you (v. 6), and He will take you safely to Zion (vv. 7-8).

See His Greatness

Be sure you lift your eyes high enough so that you see by faith the great God who cares for you. The ten spies in Canaan did not look high enough: they saw the giants and the walls but not the Lord far above all (Num. 13:28-33). When things on earth seem too big for you to handle, lift your eyes to God by meditating on Isaiah 40 (note v. 26). He is able!

PSALM 122

"Let us go" (1). Do you really rejoice when you have opportunity to go to God's house and worship Him? We today can travel easily to a place of worship, but the ancient Jews had to walk a long distance. Yet the pilgrim was happy to go to God's house.

“Let us praise” (2-5). How the people loved Jerusalem! It was a holy place because the temple was there, an honored place because David’s throne was there, and a happy place because the tribes were there to celebrate the greatness and goodness of God.

“Let us pray” (6-9). Do you pray for the peace and prosperity of the people in your local “house of God”? Do you pray for God’s people Israel? There can be no peace in our world until the Prince of Peace rules His people and there is peace in Jerusalem.

PSALM 123

Throughout their history, the Jews have often had to endure the scorn and contempt of their enemies. The world does not love God’s people. As we make our way on the narrow road that leads to Zion, we run up against the crowd going in the other direction.

Look to God’s heaven (1). If you look at the enemy, you will get discouraged, so look by faith to the God of the universe who reigns in heaven. Psalm 121 shows you how.

Look to God’s hand (2). He is the Master, we are the servants, and He tenderly cares for His own. Just be sure your ears are open to whatever orders your Master wants to give you.

Look for His help (3-4). Adequate mercy is available for you when your heart is filled with pain. Let God’s words of strength drown out the enemy’s words of scorn.

PSALM 124

The Lord is on your side when people want to *devour you* (vv. 1-3), when circumstances seem to *drown you* (vv. 4-5), and when Satan tries to *deceive you* (vv. 6-8).

You can usually detect man’s anger, and you can feel it when circumstances overwhelm you. But Satan’s traps might catch you if you are not careful. In His death, resurrection, and ascension, Jesus Christ has not only set you free from the snares, but *He has broken the snares and they can never trap you again unless you let them*.

You are free as a bird, so use your wings of faith and live in the heavenlies!

PSALM 125

Trusting the Lord means *security and stability* (vv. 1-2). Built on Mount Zion and surrounded by the mountains, Jerusalem was an impregnable fortress. The pilgrims felt safe when they arrived there after their dangerous journey. As a citizen of the heavenly Zion, you are safe in the Lord's care.

Trusting the Lord also means *sovereignty* (v. 3), bowing down to the God who holds the righteous scepter. Wickedness in our world is a temptation even to the righteous, so keep submitted to Him.

Sanctity (vv. 4-5) is a third result of trusting the Lord. When you walk by faith, you avoid the dangerous detours that lead you away from the path of righteousness. God has made you safe that you might be submitted, and your submission should lead to separated living: "Faith without works is dead" (James 2:20).

PSALM 126

This song probably celebrates Jerusalem's deliverance from the Assyrian army in the days of Hezekiah (2 Kings 18-19). It all happened so quickly that the people thought they were dreaming, and even the other nations had to admit the greatness of God.

But deliverance is just the beginning; God always wants to do something more. He wants to make us rivers of blessing (v. 4), like the dry wadis in the desert that become rushing torrents in the rainy season. If God sends you "showers of blessing," share the blessing with others.

He also wants you to get to work in the harvest (vv. 5-6). Whether it is plowing the field (Luke 9:62), sowing the seed, or reaping the sheaves, God has a place for you. If you water the seed with your tears, you will one day rejoice as you bring in the sheaves. This is the formula for a harvest: going, weeping, sowing, reaping.

His Grace

"Great things He has done!" is the theme of many people who have experienced God's grace. Samuel preached about it (1 Sam. 12:24); David thanked the Lord for it (2 Sam. 7:21, 23); Mary sang about it (Luke 1:49); and the healed demoniac told everybody about it (Luke 8:39).

PSALM 127

Do not forget the Lord (1-2). Jesus warned, "Without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5), and that truth is illustrated in this psalm. What good is all your working, watching, and waking if the Lord is not with you? Long hours and sleepless nights are a waste apart from the blessing of the Lord. This psalm is not a plea for idleness, for God expects you to work and watch. But He wants to work in you and to accomplish His will (Phil. 2:12-13).

Do not neglect your family (3-5). What good are a lovely house and a big income if the people in your life are robbed of the joys of a happy home? Children are a gift and a heritage, so appreciate them and guard them. They are like fruit, so lovingly cultivate them. They can be arrows for fighting the Lord's battles, so keep them polished and sharp and aimed in the right direction. Give yourself to building a *home*, not just a house, and building for the *future*, not just the present.

PSALM 128

This song parallels Psalm 112 and reminds you of the blessings God sends when you fear the Lord and walk in obedience to His Word.

God will bring you enjoyment in employment (v. 2) so that your work will be a blessing and not a curse. Your work will be a ministry for the Lord.

God will bless you at home, beginning at the heart of the home (your spouse) and touching everybody else around the table. Your home will be a fruitful garden, not an ugly desert.

The blessing will then spread to the city and the nation, and it will go from generation to generation (vv. 5-6).

“The beauty of the house is order; The blessing of the house is contentment; The glory of the house is hospitality; The crown of the house is godliness.”

An old motto often placed
above fireplaces

PSALM 129

Israel's afflictions are compared to the plowing of a field. Think of what it would feel like to be face down in the dirt while a plow goes down your back! How do you handle a situation like that?

First, you accept it from the Lord. *If the Lord is allowing people to plow your back, it is happening because He has planned a harvest.* Just be sure you plant the right kind of seed. If you plant anger and malice, you will not reap the blessings of the Lord.

Second, you trust the Lord to help you. In His own time, He will stop the plows *and cut the cords so they cannot plow anymore.* All their efforts will be useless.

Third, you wait for the Lord to judge your enemies. He will put them to shame and make them wither like grass on a sod roof. On the other hand, God's people will hear God's blessing in their ears and have God's blessing in their hands.

Plowing times can be productive times.

PSALM 130

As you ponder this psalm, see yourself in four different situations, and learn what it means to trust the mercy of the Lord.

In the depths (1–2). The depths of despair overwhelm you. You are drowning, and all you can do is cry out to God. He hears—and He rescues you!

In the court (3–4). You are on trial, facing your sins, and you have no defense. The Judge pays the penalty, and *you are forgiven!*

In the dark (5–6). You are waiting patiently, yet it seems morning will never come. But the sun rises, and God gives you the dawning of a new day!

On the block (7–8). You are a slave, bound by your own sins, and you are about to sell yourself to a terrible master. But the Savior comes and purchases you and sets you free!

What a wonderful salvation you have!

PSALM 131

Most children naturally resist weaning because they want to continue enjoying the special attention of mother and the security it brings. Children do not realize that the traumatic experience of weaning is the first step toward maturity and freedom.

From birth to death, life is a series of weanings, and God never takes anything from you without giving you something better. You may weep and try to hold on to the past, but God tenderly leads you toward the future.

Weaned children discover who they are and what they can do. They have quiet hearts and no desire to go back to babyhood. They live for the future and watch for the special things that come to children growing up. They learn to obey, for only then can they fully experience all that the Father has for them.

As you mature in the Lord, you must “put away childish things” (1 Cor. 13:11). When God weans you away from something, do not fret; He has something better to take its place.

PSALM 132

Some students believe that this psalm was written when the Jewish exiles returned to their land from Babylon. This theory explains why David is mentioned. It was a difficult time as the Jews tried to rebuild their temple, their city, and their

nation, and their beloved King David had been involved in these endeavors. The returned exiles wanted God to remember His covenant with David and restore their land.

The temple (1-9). David yearned to build the temple, but the Lord chose his son Solomon instead. However, David provided the plans for the temple (1 Chron. 28:11-19) and much of the wealth needed. Would God desert His people as they tried to rebuild the temple that meant so much to David?

The throne (10-12). God promised that David's line would continue on the throne (2 Sam. 7), but now Israel was without a king. In fact, there would be no king until Jesus came, and they would reject Him. One day, He will return and restore David's throne (Luke 1:30-33; Acts 15:14-18).

The city (13-18). Jerusalem was in ruins, but it was the City of David and would not be forgotten by the Lord. He would dwell there, bless the people, and give them joy. He would restore power (the horn) and light (the lamp) and make the city a testimony to the nations.

When the going is tough, remember those feeble Jews who sacrificed to restore what sin had destroyed. They prepared the way for the Son of God who came to their city and temple and gave His life for the sins of the world.

PSALM 133

It is one thing for a group of people to *journey together* to Jerusalem for a feast and quite something else for them to *live together* day after day. Abraham and Lot, Isaac and his family, Jacob and Laban, and Joseph's brothers remind us that brethren do not always dwell together in unity.

Unity must come down from above, like the oil running down Aaron's beard and bathing the twelve jewels on the breastplate (Exod. 29:5-7), or like the dew descending on the mountains. You can manufacture uniformity by manipulating people and exerting pressure, but true unity can come only from God by His Spirit.

Unity is good like the dew and produces fruitfulness. It is pleasant like the oil and produces a lovely fragrance. Divisions among God's people produce opposite results. Have you heeded the admonition of Ephesians 4:1-6?

PSALM 134

Have you ever given thanks for the people who work the night shift? Were it not for them, you would have no electricity or water at night, no fire or police protection, or no emergency service at the hospital. While you are asleep, others are serving. Be grateful!

But do the people on the night shift give thanks? Perhaps not. The psalmist admonished the priests in the temple to give thanks as they served God and the people at night. It may have been a lonely ministry, but it was an important ministry.

Your High Priest in heaven intercedes for you day and night. He never grows weary or impatient. Have you told Him you are thankful for His faithful ministry? Are you willing to be like Him and serve others, even on the night shift?

PSALM 135

The psalmist opened his song praising the Lord four times (vv. 1-3), and he ended it blessing the Lord four times (vv. 19-21). In between, he gave four excellent reasons why the Lord deserves your heartfelt praise.

To begin with, He is the God of *salvation* (v. 4). In His grace, He chose you; in His mercy, He made you His special treasure. You belong to Him. He values you and He loves you.

He is the God of *creation* (vv. 5-7), which means He provides for you day after day and gives you the things you need. He is in charge of the storms and uses them to accomplish His perfect will.

He is the God of *history* (vv. 8-14). The Jews prided themselves in the fact that God worked especially on behalf of their nation. He worked for Israel and through Israel to bring about His great plan of salvation.

He is the God of *celebration* (vv. 15-18). These verses parallel Psalm 115 and show the greatness of the living God in contrast to the dead idols of the nations. Celebrate the Lord today! Bless His holy name!

PSALM 136

Two choirs sang this psalm. One choir sang the first line of each verse, and the other choir answered, "For His mercy en-

dures forever.” This was not vain repetition (Matt. 6:7), for the second choir was offering inspired praise to the Lord. You can never say too much about the mercy of God!

God reveals His mercy by giving you a wonderful creation to use and to enjoy (vv. 4–9). Just think, He had everything ready for our first parents when He made them! It is too bad that many people are such poor stewards of God’s creation gifts. Never take for granted the wonderful world you live in.

He reveals His mercy in His care for you, helping you fight your battles and defeat your enemies (vv. 10–25). Israel was not always faithful to God, but that is where His mercy comes in! He was faithful to them.

The God of heaven is caring for you on earth! His mercy endures forever!

PSALM 137

This psalm came out of Israel’s exile in Babylon, and it can serve as an inventory of your spiritual life today.

What makes you weep (1)? The Jews wept as they remembered the past, but they did not weep over their sins. They wept because their sins caught up with them, not because they had sinned.

What makes you sing (2–4)? They lost their song, so they hung up their harps. David had a similar experience (Ps. 32:1–7). Can you sing praises to God in a difficult place (Acts 16:25)? Can you praise the Lord at all times?

What makes you yearn (5–6)? What is the ache in your heart? What do you long for more than anything else? Is it in God’s will?

What makes you angry (7–9)? God had promised to judge Babylon (Isa. 13; note v. 16), so they were praying in His will; but the note of anguish is missing. (See the entry on Ps. 58 for comments on the “imprecatory psalms.”) If you love the Lord, you must hate evil (Ps. 97:10; Rom. 12:9) but leave the judgment to the Lord (Rom. 12:17–21).

PSALM 138

Walking “in the midst of trouble” did not hinder the psalmist’s *worship* (vv. 1–3). If anything, it helped him to pray and to

praise the Lord even more. David could not go to the temple, so he worshiped "toward the temple"; and God helped him.

His troubles did not hinder his *witness* (vv. 4-6). David may have been among the Gentiles when he wrote this psalm, but he was careful to share the Word and instruct them on singing God's praises. Trouble can be God's way to open doors for you to share the gospel.

His troubles did not hinder his *walk* (vv. 7-8). God revived David and enabled him to defeat his foes. Best of all, God perfected His plan for David and made him a better man (Eph. 2:10; Phil. 2:12-13).

You may think that your troubles give you an excuse to stop living for the Lord. This psalm says that just the opposite is true! Read it again and follow David's example.

PSALM 139

If you are faithful to the Lord, this psalm will encourage you. If you are trying to hide from the Lord, this psalm will make you realize you are fighting a losing battle.

He knows what you do (1-6). He knows you personally and intimately, so do not try to fool Him. Be open and honest with God, and rest in His love (1 John 4:18). His eye is upon you, and you have nothing to fear.

He knows where you go (7-12). What a comfort to know that God is with you and cares for you! Whether you go up or down, east or west, He is there (Heb. 13:5). Sinners try to hide from God, but believers hide in God.

He knows what you are (13-16). After all, He made you, planned your potential, and ordered your days. This is not some kind of blind fatalism that paralyzes you. It is the wise plan of a loving Father who knows what is best for you. Accept what you are as His gift to you, and then use it wisely as your gift to Him. You are *unique*; God made you that way.

He knows what you think (17-18). The psalmist pondered the thoughts of God and in this way cultivated the presence of God in his life. "You are to meditate on these things" (Phil. 4:8).

He knows what you love (19-22). Take these words to heart: "You who love the LORD, hate evil" (Ps. 97:10); "Love not the world" (1 John 2:15-17).

He knows what you desire (23-24). You do not know your own heart as well as you may think you do (Jer. 17:9-10). Let God search you and deal with the things that make you anxious. Let Him lead you. He knows where you ought to go.

PSALM 140

Satan fights anyone who is doing the will of God, and David was no exception. You must pray for Christian leaders especially, for they are prime targets for the evil one. The enemy has two favorite weapons: poisonous tongues (vv. 1-3) and hidden traps (vv. 4-5). He slanders God's leaders (sometimes using the lips of professed Christians), and he sets traps for them, hoping to trip them up.

David depended on prayer (vv. 6-11), God's promise (v. 12), and praise (v. 13). God hates a lying tongue (Prov. 6:17) and will one day judge slanderers. Meanwhile, maintain your character before God and let Him take care of your reputation. So live that when people hear lies about you, they will not believe them.

PSALM 141

"My voice . . . my hands" (1-2). David was away from God's house, but he knew he could worship the Lord even without a priest or an altar. His prayer would be like the incense on the golden altar (Exod. 30:1-10), and the lifting of his hands in praise like the burnt offering on the brazen altar (Exod. 29:38-41; Heb. 13:15). No matter where you are, worship the Lord!

"My mouth . . . my lips" (3-4). When evil is near you, and evil people tempt you, it is easy to say the wrong thing. It is the heart that needs protection (Matt. 12:34-37).

"My head" (5-7). "Faithful are the wounds of a friend" (Prov. 27:6): they may hurt, but like oil, they heal. Watch out for the kisses—and delicacies (v. 4)—of the enemy.

"My eyes" (8-10). Keep your eyes of faith on the Lord, and He will direct and protect your steps.

David gave *himself* to the Lord as the evening sacrifice, every part of his being (Rom. 12:1-2). This is the highest kind of worship and the greatest privilege.

PSALM 142

Another of David's "cave" psalms (Ps. 57; see also 1 Sam. 22:1-2, 24:1ff.), Psalm 142 is filled with assurances you can claim when you find yourself in a difficult place.

God hears your prayers (1-2). There are times when prayer is worship (Ps. 141:1), and there are times when prayer is warfare. In the heat of the battle, pour out your heart to the Lord and tell Him how you feel and what you need. Turn the cave into a Holy of Holies.

God knows your path (3). David walked in God's will, but the enemy lied about him and set traps to catch him. Walk with the Lord a step at a time and He will see you through (Ps. 16:11; Prov. 3:5-6).

God feels your pain (4). David felt completely abandoned, but he knew the Lord was with him (2 Tim. 4:16-18). When you feel like nobody cares, remember that *He cares for you* (1 Pet. 5:7).

God is your portion (5). If you have God, what more do you need? One with God is a majority, so be wholly satisfied with Him.

God will be praised (6-7). It may not look like it now, but one day your trials will turn out for your good and God's glory. Start praising Him now—by faith—and you will be "tuned up" when the answer comes.

PSALM 143

Unless you have been engaged in the Lord's battles, you may not understand this prayer, for it is the cry of a soldier in combat. It is also a penitential prayer.

"Hear me" (1-6). Depend on God's grace and faithfulness, not on your righteousness. Tell God what is happening in your life. David was in the dust and in the darkness. He felt like a thirsty man dying in a desert.

"Answer me" (7-9). When God does not answer prayer, it is as though His face turns away from us and we sink into the grave. Do you find strength and joy in answered prayer?

"Teach me" (10). David met with the Lord each morning and got his orders for the day. Without those orders, he did not

know how to walk. Trust God's Spirit to lead you as you yield yourself to Him.

"Revive me" (11-12). David was in the dust (v. 3), and only God could raise him up. David wanted to fight the Lord's battles and establish righteousness in the land. True prayer means that we serve God, not that God serves us (v. 12).

PSALM 144

This is another battle song to help you in your spiritual warfare.

Let God train you *before the battle* (vv. 1-4). In yourself, you are nothing, but God loves you and equips you for what lies ahead. God does not always explain how He prepares you, so accept His disciplines by faith. David fought a lion and a bear before God let him fight a giant. Each morning, put on the whole armor of God and be ready for the trumpet call (Eph. 6:10-18).

Let God help you *in the battle* (vv. 5-8). God's hand is there to strengthen and deliver you, so do not be afraid to engage the enemy. You are fighting the Lord's battles; He will not abandon you (2 Chron. 20:14-19).

Sing God's praises *after the battle* (vv. 9-15). Thank Him for all He has done for you personally (vv. 9-11), for your family (v. 12), and for your nation (vv. 13-15).

PSALM 145

David extols the Lord for His greatness (v. 3), grace (vv. 8, 17), goodness (v. 9), glory (vv. 11-12), and generosity (vv. 15-16). If you are having a hard time praising the Lord today, that should help get you started! God's people will praise Him forever, so we had better learn to do it day by day (v. 2).

David extols the Lord as an encouragement to others. Members of each generation need to learn to praise the Lord (vv. 4-7), so your praise is an example and witness to them. Are others growing in their worship because of you?

David hears all God's works praising Him (v. 10). Nature takes on new meaning and new beauty when you realize this (Ps. 19:1-6).

When you live a life of praise, you have the Lord's help in every situation. If you stumble, He helps you up (v. 14). If you are hungry, He feeds you (vv. 15–16). If you call, He draws near (v. 18). No wonder David blessed the Lord so much!

PSALM 146

Praise is an evidence of *life* (vv. 1–2), not just physical life, but the life of God in the heart. In heaven, it is all praise; in hell, there is no praise; here on earth, you must make a choice.

Praise is an encouragement to *faith* (vv. 3–4). When you have faith in somebody—your doctor, for instance—you praise that person to others. When your faith is low, your praise will gradually subside, but when you major on praise, your faith will grow.

Praise is an encouragement to *hope* (vv. 5–7). When your hope is in the Lord, you can praise Him no matter what the circumstances may be. Faith is the upward look, and hope is the forward look.

Praise is an encouragement to *love* (vv. 8–10), your love for God and others, and God's love for you. When you love someone, you trust that person, and greater trust brings greater love.

Life, faith, hope, and love—all are bound up in the experience of praise.

PSALM 147

Praising the Lord is the highest exercise of your faculties. He is worthy of praise, and you should praise Him whether or not you think your praise is accomplishing anything in your life. However, there are some blessings that come to those who worship Him in truth.

Praise brings spiritual beauty to God's people (v. 1; Pss. 27:4, 29:2; 149:4). It builds His work and unifies His people (v. 2). It heals the inner person (v. 3) and lifts the fallen (v. 6). Praise is good medicine!

Praise makes God's world real and personal to you (vv. 7–9, 15–18), even the storms; and it is great protection against the enemy (vv. 12–14). Praise pleases the Lord and enables Him to work in your life (vv. 10–11).

Praise must never become a pragmatic device for getting blessing from God. When you sincerely praise Him, the blessing will come. Praise changes things—and people.

***How
Do You
Mend a
Broken
Heart?***

The God who numbers and names the stars knows about your broken heart and can heal it—if you give all the pieces to Him (Ps. 147:3–4).

PSALM 148

When it comes to praising the Lord, the psalmist will not permit anyone or anything in all creation to escape.

The heavens (1–6). He starts with the angels, then summons the heavenly bodies, and even includes the clouds! God created them, established them, and controls them. They should praise Him—and they do!

The earth (7–10). Whether the depths of the sea or the heights of the mountains, the winds or the fruitful trees, all should praise the Lord—and they do! When the weather is bad, it is good to know that even the storms fulfill God's Word (v. 8).

Mankind (11–14). Made in God's image, men and women have more reason to praise God than does any other thing in creation. And when you have been saved by God's grace, your motive is even greater. Praise the Lord!

PSALM 149

God's people should be a singing people. They should sing *in the sanctuary* (vv. 1–4) because God is their Savior (v. 1), their Maker, and their King (v. 2). You are reminded again that

praise pleases God and beautifies God's people (v. 4; Ps. 147:1, 11).

You should sing *at home* (v. 5), even when in bed! Sing when you wake up in the morning, when you take a nap, when you go to bed at night. If it is a bed of illness, sing to the Lord even more.

Sing to the Lord *on the battlefield* (vv. 6–9). God's Word is your sword (Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12), and it should be on your lips as well as in your hand. Praise is a wonderful weapon for defeating the enemy.

PSALM 150

It is only right that the closing song in the Hebrew hymnal be an invitation to praise the Lord. The word *praise* is used thirteen times here.

Where should we praise Him? Locally and universally, in the temple and in the vast heavens (v. 1). In other words, wherever you are, praise the Lord!

Why should we praise Him? Because of what He does and who He is (v. 2). The better you know God's character and works, the more you will praise Him and the more you will enjoy praising Him.

How should we praise Him? With voices and instruments, including the cymbals, and with our bodies expressing the joy we feel within (vv. 3–5). The whole person should be one living sacrifice that praises the Lord.

Who should praise Him? "Everything that has breath" (v. 6). But things that do not have breath praise Him (Ps. 148:7–9), so we have even more reason to do so! Our breath comes from Him (Acts 17:25), so we ought to use it to praise His name. Breath is the weakest thing we have, but we can devote it to the highest service, praising the Lord.

PROVERBS

A proverb has been defined as a “short statement based on long experience.” The Hebrew word translated “proverb” means “to be like,” and many of the proverbs are contrasts or comparisons. The proverbs deal with the ethical and moral aspects of life. They are practical, not theoretical, and point the way to godly character and a fulfilled life.

The theme of Proverbs is wisdom, the right use of knowledge. This wisdom is more than an intellectual pursuit; it also involves devotion to the Lord. The wise person fears the Lord, trusts Him, and seeks to obey His will. The wisdom described in Proverbs is like a spiritual “sixth sense.” It enables you to evaluate circumstances and people and make the right decisions in life.

Since a proverb is only the statement of a general truth, it must not be taken for a divine promise. David and Jesus both pleased the Lord, but they still had enemies (Prov. 16:7); and more than one obedient child of God has died young (Prov. 10:27). Not all godly people have houses full of money (Prov. 15:6), and many godless people eat well (Prov. 13:25). In the light of eternity, the wicked are the losers—no matter how successful they may be—but Proverbs focuses primarily on this life, not the next.

These wise sayings are “distilled truth” made practical for daily living. You find in them principles, warnings, and counsels that really work *when you fear the Lord and want to please Him*. The book of Proverbs is not a do-it-yourself success kit for the greedy but a guidebook for the godly.

Most of the book was written by Solomon (1:1; see also 1 Kings 4:32), with contributions from other writers (22:17; 24:23; 30:1; 31:1). “The men of Hezekiah” (25:1) probably edited the book to its present form.

Proverbs covers a wide range of subjects, and the verses are not arranged in topical order. In our meditations, we will concentrate on a major emphasis in each chapter, and from time to time, we will bring together verses that relate to a common theme.

PROVERBS 1

The importance of wisdom (1–6). All you need for success is yours when you receive God’s wisdom. “Success” means much more than making a living. It means making a life that honors God and serves others. Wisdom is more important than riches and power (Prov. 8:12–21) because wisdom helps you build for all eternity.

The instruction of wisdom (7–19). “The fear of the LORD” means reverence for God and respect for His Word, a willingness to listen and a promptness to obey. God uses different people to teach you wisdom, and you must be alert to each lesson. Note the warnings: “Do not forsake! Do not consent! Do not walk!” God says no that He might say yes.

Who Is Wise?

The truly wise person will hear the Word of God (Prov. 1:5) and obey it (Prov. 12:15); store up what is learned (Prov. 9:9; 10:14); win the lost (Prov. 11:30); turn from sin (Prov. 14:16); control the tongue (Prov. 10:19; 16:23); and be diligent (Prov. 10:5). The wise person will inherit glory (Prov. 3:35); bring joy to others (Prov. 10:1; 15:20); have his or her needs met (Prov. 21:20); and have strength for war (Prov. 24:5–6).

The invitation of wisdom (20–33). Wisdom is like a lovely woman inviting hungry people to a great feast (Prov. 1:20–33;

8:1ff.; 9:1ff.). Folly is like an evil woman seducing the ignorant into sin (5:1ff.; 6:20ff.; 7:1ff.). Accept wisdom's call and you will be blessed; accept folly's call and you will be destroyed.

PROVERBS 2

Wisdom is not only a person to know (chap. 1) but also a path to walk. The word *path* is used seven times in this chapter. It suggests to us that life involves direction, decision, and determination, just like walking a path. God will do His part (vv. 6–9) if you do your part (vv. 1–5).

The Path of the Unwise

Wisdom addresses three kinds of people: the simple, the scorner, and the fool. The simple are people who believe everything (Prov. 14:15). They have no understanding (Prov. 7:7; 9:4) and cannot see the road ahead (Prov. 22:3; 27:12). Scorners think they know everything (Prov. 21:24), so they never attain wisdom (Prov. 14:6) or even profit from rebuke (Prov. 9:7–8; 13:1; 15:12). They are great trouble-makers (Prov. 22:10) who ought to be punished (Prov. 19:29; 21:11). Fools are self-confident (Prov. 12:15; 28:26) and hate instruction (Prov. 1:7, 22; 23:9). They speak proudly (Prov. 10:18; 14:3), love to fight (Prov. 18:6–7; 27:3), meddle (Prov. 20:3), speak without thinking (Prov. 18:13; 19:11), and mock at sin (Prov. 14:9). They are not helped by discipline (Prov. 17:10; 27:22) and will finally fall (Prov. 10:8, 10, 14).

The path of wisdom is a guarded path (v. 8) and a good path (v. 9) that leads to life (v. 19) and righteousness (v. 20). The path of folly is a dark (v. 13) and devious (v. 15) path that leads to death (v. 18).

If you want to walk on the path of God's wisdom, heed the admonitions in verses 1-5.

PROVERBS 3

Your heart (1-8). What you do with your heart determines what you do with your life (Prov. 4:23). Cultivate an obedient heart (v. 1) that receives God's Word (v. 3; 2 Cor. 3:1-3) and a trusting heart that obeys (vv. 5-6). Verse 5 does not suggest that you ignore your mind or common sense, but that you not lean only on them and reject God's way.

Your possessions (9-20). Put God first in the way you use His wealth (Matt. 6:33) and major on the things that money cannot buy (vv. 13-18). When God corrects you, accept it as an evidence of His love (Heb. 12:5-6).

Your conduct (21-26). Let every part of your body be controlled by God's wisdom (Rom. 12:1-2). Sleep is one of the tests of faith and true surrender to God (Ps. 4).

Your neighbors (27-35). If you want God's blessing on your home, be a blessing to those around you. Share what you have and never plan evil against others (Rom. 12:9-21).

PROVERBS 4

The wise person encourages others to hear the Word and find wisdom. The father received wisdom when he was a boy, and he admonished his children to do the same. Live today so that your counsel and example will influence others and help them live wisely.

When you have wisdom, you have protection (v. 6) and promotion (vv. 8-9) and you will have the freedom to make progress (v. 12). As you obey His Word, the light will get brighter on the path of life (v. 18). But this is not true if you are on the path of the wicked.

Again, Solomon emphasized having your whole person controlled by God's Word (vv. 20-27; Col. 3:16). This will guide you on the right path and keep you from detours.

◆

**Samson
on the
Wrong
Path**

Samson was a gifted man who ignored many of the instructions given in Proverbs 1—4. Read Judges 13—16 and note that he did not seek God's wisdom but went his own rebellious way. He took his eyes off the right path and ended up on the path of darkness and death. He chose the wrong friends and followed folly instead of wisdom. Had he allowed the Word to control his whole person, Samson would have brought blessing to himself and glory to God.

◆

PROVERBS 5

In a world that has commercialized sex and turned adultery into entertainment, this warning is desperately needed. Few people believe that there are tragic consequences to sexual sin, but Solomon names some of them.

◆

Sexual Sin

Sexual immorality is like walking a path that leads to death (Prov. 2:16–22) and hell (Prov. 5:5); like deliberately burning and wounding yourself (Prov. 6:20–35); like being slaughtered as an animal (Prov. 7:6–27); like closing your eyes and falling into a pit (Prov. 22:14; 23:26–28). Ponder Hebrews 13:4.

◆

What begins as something “sweet” gradually turns into something bitter; what is “life” becomes death; and the end

is hell (vv. 4–5). You lose honor, years of life, wealth, and joy (vv. 7–14), and what you think is freedom is really the worst kind of bondage (vv. 21–23). The physical consequences alone ought to make a person want to obey God (v. 11).

Sex in marriage should be like drinking refreshing water from a clean fountain, while illicit sex is like drinking at a sewer (vv. 15–20). The Hebrew word translated “enraptured” in verse 19 means “intoxicated.” When husband and wife love each other as God wants them to, the water turns into wine! (See John 2:1–11.)

PROVERBS 6

Deliver yourself (1–5). Wicked works will ensnare you (Prov. 5:22), but so will reckless words. You must be careful when you make promises. If you do not learn to say no, you will end up in bondage, and the price will be very high. Better to humble yourself and get free than to let your pride ruin you.

Teach yourself (6–11). Learn from the world of nature (Prov. 30:15–31). The ant makes good use of opportunities to prepare for the future, but the sluggard is aimless and lazy and ends up in poverty. The preacher who used this text was correct when he titled his sermon “Rock-A-Bye, Lullaby, Bye-Bye.”

Guard yourself (12–35). Watch out for the wicked man (vv. 12–19) and the evil woman (vv. 20–35). Hate what God hates and love what God loves and you will enjoy what God enjoys.

The Sluggard

The sluggard likes to sleep (Prov. 6:6–11; 24:30–34) and expects everybody else to serve him (Prov. 12:27; 19:24). He dreams of wealth but ends up poor (Prov. 13:4; 21:25–26). He is good at excuses (Prov. 20:4; 22:13; 26:13–16) but poor at performance (Prov. 10:26). He is not a builder but a destroyer (Prov. 18:9).

PROVERBS 7

When wisdom is your sister, you will not be seduced by the temptress (vv. 1–5; Ps. 119:11). Your feet will not go near her house. And if she should come after you, your heart will see through all her enticements and have no desire for her.

Expensive tapestries cannot cover the ugliness of sin, and the most aromatic spices cannot turn the stench of sin into fragrant perfume (vv. 16–17). No matter what temptation is offered you, look beyond the externals and see it as it really is.

You are made in the image of God, but sin drags you down to the level of a beast (vv. 22–23) and eventually to the level of Satan himself (v. 27)! Is it worth it?

PROVERBS 8

Listen! Wisdom's first call was from the crowded city square (1:20ff.), but now she is "where the paths meet" (v. 2). When you are confronted with truth, you are at a place of decision, and the decision you make will have inevitable consequences. Keep your ears open and listen to God's wisdom (vv. 6, 32, 34).

Love! Wisdom says, "I love those who love me" (v. 17). Love wisdom rather than wealth (vv. 10–11, 18–21), for wisdom enriches you for eternity. Verses 22–31 make you think of Jesus Christ, who is the Wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:30; Col. 2:3). To love wisdom is to love Christ, and when you love Christ, you live for Him.

Linger! Spend time daily at wisdom's door as you read God's Word and meditate on His truth. According to verse 14, God will give you counsel (what to do), wisdom (how to do it), understanding (why you do it), and strength (the ability to do it). Instead of serving as a slave, you will reign as a king (vv. 15–16).

PROVERBS 9

Come and dine! You see two houses and hear two invitations. Wisdom offers you a banquet of bread, meat, and wine; folly offers you stolen bread and water. Wisdom promises you life, but if you eat at folly's table, you will die. Which house will you enter?

Come and learn! Scoffers know so much that nobody can teach them anything, but the wise learn from rebuke. You may not enjoy it when somebody reproves you, but it will do you good. (See Ps. 141:5.)

Come and live! Wisdom multiplies days (v. 11). Those who abuse their bodies with sin usually cut their lives short, but when you follow wisdom, you can add years to your life—and life to your years! God gives a fullness of experience to those who obey Him.

Rebuke

The way you respond to criticism and rebuke reveals the kind of person you are (Prov. 9:7–9). Scoffers will not listen to rebuke (Prov. 13:1) or love those who rebuke them (Prov. 15:12). The wise person knows that rebuke is evidence of love (Prov. 27:5) and will value it (Prov. 25:12) and gain understanding from it (Prov. 19:25). Ponder Proverbs 27:6.

PROVERBS 10

Wise and righteous are key words in this chapter, and they go together, for the wise practice righteousness and the righteous grow in wisdom.

The wise bring joy and not grief to their parents (v. 1). They will take advantage of God-given opportunities (v. 5) and will obey orders (v. 8). Wise people gather knowledge (v. 14) and share it with others (vv. 13, 21, 31). They also know when to be quiet (v. 19). They do not jest about sin (v. 23) but are serious about obeying the Lord.

The righteous have God's protection and provision (vv. 2–3, 24–25), and He blesses them in life (v. 6) and after death (v. 7). Their words give life (vv. 11, 20–21, 31–32), and their works prosper (v. 16). Their future is secure (v. 30) and joyful (v. 28).

If you are wise and righteous, those traits will be revealed by your words (vv. 6, 11, 14, 20–21, 31–32) as well as by your works.

◆-----◆

***The Tongue
of the
Righteous***

The wise person's words are like silver (Prov. 10:20), a tree of life (Prov. 15:4), food (Prov. 10:21), refreshing water (Prov. 10:11; 18:4), and medicine (Prov. 12:18). They should be seasoned with salt (Col. 4:6) and must not become destructive (James 3:1–12).

◆-----◆

PROVERBS 11

The contrast is between the righteous and the wicked. God delights in the righteous (v. 20) and delivers them from lust (v. 6), death (v. 4), trouble (v. 8), and gossip (v. 9). God also delivers their families (v. 21).

God guides the upright in their integrity (v. 3) because they desire what God desires (v. 23). They sow righteousness (v. 18) and flourish like a healthy tree (vv. 28, 30). The upright are a blessing to others (vv. 10–11), and they gain a sure reward (v. 18).

Reread the chapter and discover what happens to the wicked.

PROVERBS 12

God uses the mouth of the righteous to bring deliverance (v. 6), but the mouth of the wicked brings bondage (v. 13). Right words must begin with right thoughts (v. 5) and a love for learning (v. 1), and this is where the ungodly person fails.

Right words bring good to others (Prov. 10:21) and also to those who speak them (v. 14; Prov. 13:2). With your words, you

can help to heal those who have been hurt (v. 18) and who have suffered because of lies (vv. 19–22). You can bring joy to those who are depressed and worried (v. 25).

Be alert today for God-given opportunities to speak healing words to hurting people.

Liars

Because He is a God of truth, the Lord hates a lying tongue (Prov. 6:17; 12:22). With lies, people cover their true feelings (Prov. 10:18) and promote hypocrisy (Prov. 26:23–26). Liars do not last (Prov. 12:19), but lies can go on for years and do great damage. Wealth gained by lies is fleeting (Prov. 21:6), and all liars will one day be punished (Prov. 19:5, 9). If God hates lies, we must hate them, too (Prov. 13:5). Ponder Ephesians 4:17–32.

PROVERBS 13

This chapter gives some practical counsel on how to be wise. First, listen to rebuke and instruction (v. 1) and learn to take advice (v. 10) and discipline (v. 24). Walk with the wise (v. 20) and listen to their conversation (v. 14), and you will become more like them. As you meditate on the Word of God, you walk with the wisest of the wise, so do not neglect the Scriptures (v. 13).

The chapter also offers counsel concerning wealth. Diligent people will work and gain wealth (v. 4) and not get it dishonestly (v. 11). Verse 7 cautions you not to be rich in the things money can buy while you ignore the things money cannot buy. The rich are often poorer than the poor when it comes to what really counts!

Discipline

"Spare the rod and spoil the child" is an old English proverb that was probably based on a similar Latin proverb. The Bible's version is Proverbs 13:24. When parents discipline their children in love, they follow the example of the Lord Himself (Prov. 3:11–12; Heb. 12:5–6; Rev. 3:19). The purpose is improvement (Prov. 22:15), not the venting of anger, and their only desire must be the welfare of the child (Prov. 19:18; 23:13–14; 29:15, 17).

PROVERBS 14

Watch out for fools (v. 7)! Wisdom builds but folly destroys (v. 1), and the tent of the godly is stronger than the house of the wicked (v. 11). When you obey the Word of God, you build on a solid foundation (Matt. 7:21–27).

Watch out for fools! Their speech can tear you down (v. 7), for their words are like a rod that hurts (v. 3). You cannot trust what they say (v. 8); they mock at sin (v. 9); and they rage in their self-confidence (v. 16). Be sure to watch out for their temper (vv. 17, 29); it can get you and them into trouble.

When you fear the Lord, your walk will be marked by uprightness (vv. 2, 16), confidence (v. 26), and protection (v. 27). The fear of the Lord is better than the folly of fools.

PROVERBS 15

When you open your mouth, you let people know whether you are foolish or wise. The wise share knowledge and are like fruitful trees that feed many (v. 4). Fools pour out words that accomplish nothing (v. 2).

The wise know how to control anger (v. 18) and respond to anger (v. 1). The “soft answer” is neither deception nor flattery, but saying the right thing (v. 28) at the right time (v. 23) in the right spirit (v. 1).

What comes out of the mouth begins in the heart (Matt. 12:35), so maintain a joyful heart before the Lord (vv. 13, 15) and fill your heart with His truth (v. 14). God sees your heart; do not try to hide anything from Him (v. 11).

Most of all, ask God for help in saying the right thing (vv. 8, 29). David’s prayer in Psalm 141:3–4 is a good place to start.

PROVERBS 16

A prepared heart (1–3, 23) is a heart that receives God’s truth and submits to God’s will. Since the mouth speaks what the heart has treasured up, the Lord can guide your words when your heart is prepared (Matt. 10:19–20).

A proud heart (5, 18–19). Pride is one sin that God especially hates. It leads to all kinds of trouble and robs you of the blessing of the Lord.

A purposeful heart (7, 9, 25). If your heart is not devoted to God’s purposes, then it will lead you astray. Take time to think and pray, meditate on the Word, and make your plans; and then trust the Lord to guide you.

A prudent heart (20–24). When wisdom is your food and drink, then you will be able to make prudent decisions. A prudent heart is revealed by lips that speak sweet words of wisdom.

A perverse heart (27–30). What is in the heart eventually comes out in the life, and the life described here is anything but beautiful or useful. No wonder Proverbs 4:23 is in God’s Word! Are you heeding it?

PROVERBS 17

Use this chapter as the basis for a spiritual inventory. God has many ways of testing your heart (v. 3).

What do you listen to (4)? Your ears will hear what your heart loves, so guard your inner affections.

What do you rejoice in (5)? Are you glad when others suffer? Do you use the plight of others to promote yourself?

What do you talk about (9)? Do morsels of gossip bring delight to your heart, and do you enjoy sharing them with others? The best thing is to cover sin and let God deal with it.

What do you get angry at (10, 13–14)? Do you accept criticism or respond with anger? Do you think of ways to retaliate, or do you try to stop disagreements at the beginning?

What do you give in to (23)? “Every man has his price,” claims the world, but it must not be true of believers. Is your conscience for sale?

PROVERBS 18

Friends. Friendship has its risks (v. 19), but the isolated person is not wise (v. 1). We belong to each other, and we need each other (v. 14). We may have many acquaintances, but we have few real friends. The person with too many friends may end up in trouble (v. 24 margin). Be a true friend and God will give you true friends who will stick close to you throughout life.

True Friends

A real friend can be trusted (Prov. 11:13; 17:9) and will stay with you when you are in trouble (Prov. 17:17; 25:19).

Friends love you too much to pamper you (Prov. 27:6, 17), and their counsel helps you (Prov. 27:9). A real friend is good for generations (Prov. 27:10)! Some people do not make good friends: those who tempt you to sin (Prov. 1:10ff.); gluttons (Prov. 28:7); drunkards (Prov. 23:20–21); gossips (Prov. 20:19); the violent and angry (Prov. 16:29; 22:24–25); and flatterers (Prov. 27:14). Your best friends are those who have Jesus Christ as their Friend and seek to be like Him (John 15:12–15).

Fools. Fools do not make good friends for many reasons. For one thing, they like to talk so much that they do not hear what others say (v. 2). Their foolish words cause fights (vv. 6-7) and inward pain (v. 8). Their impatience to speak makes them jump to conclusions (vv. 13, 17), and that creates problems (v. 5). The only hope for fools is that they will stop talking and start to listen to wisdom (v. 15).

“*No one can develop freely in this world and find a full life without feeling understood by at least one person.*”

Paul Tournier

PROVERBS 19

Rich and poor. It is better to be rich in character and poor in wealth, especially when that wealth is acquired by deception (vv. 1, 22). If friendship is based on wealth, it is not friendship at all (vv. 4, 6-7). True friendship goes much deeper. Be careful how you treat the poor because God is concerned about them (v. 17).

Wise and foolish. Wise people submit to the Lord and walk a straight way, but fools argue with the Lord and twist their way (v. 3). Wealth is no evidence of wisdom (v. 10); in fact, a fool only wastes wealth.

The Poor

Some people become poor because of having wrong values (Prov. 16:16), being lazy (Prov. 10:4; 14:23), following sinful pleasures (Prov. 21:17; 23:21), refusing good counsel (Prov. 13:18), and not planning carefully (Prov. 21:5). But some are poor because they cannot help it. They may be the victims of injustice (Prov.

22:22–23) or have such heavy debts they cannot succeed (Prov. 22:7). You should show mercy to the poor (Prov. 14:21, 31; 19:17; 21:13), for the same Lord made us all (Prov. 22:2).

◆
Fathers and sons. Every father wants wise sons who will use their inheritance wisely (vv. 13–14). Lazy sons only bring poverty (v. 15). The father who chastens his son will help him build character (v. 18), but the son who chases his father away will bring shame and reproach (v. 26). Sons who listen to their fathers (and their Father in heaven) will stay on the right path (v. 27). (This paragraph can also be applied to mothers and daughters.)

PROVERBS 20

If you are wise, you will consider the consequences of your decisions and actions. You will ask, “What about *afterward*?”

The afterward of strong drink (v. 1) is not pleasant, and the afterward of starting trouble (v. 2) could be dangerous. Better to stop the trouble at the beginning (v. 3).

Lazy People

The book of Proverbs has nothing good to say about laziness. Even the feeble ants are more diligent than the sluggard (6:6–11)! It is shameful to sleep when there is work to do (10:4–5; 24:30–34). One of these days, the lazy person will be forced to work (10:24) to get something to eat (19:15). Lazy people can think up many excuses not to work (20:4; 22:13; 26:13–16), and nothing anybody says will do them any good.

Sleep is essential to good health, but the afterward of too much sleep is poverty (vv. 4, 13). A crooked business deal may be profitable financially, but you will not enjoy the aftertaste (v. 17). You may enjoy getting your inheritance now, but afterward it may do you more harm than good (v. 21). Remember what happened to the prodigal son (Luke 15:11ff.).

Rash promises have an afterward of regret (verse 25; Eccles. 5:1–7), but loving discipline has an afterward of reform. Ponder Hebrews 12:3–11, and especially note v. 11.

PROVERBS 21

God can turn hearts (v. 1) and accomplish His purposes. He can also test hearts to see what we are really like (v. 2). He wants both righteousness and justice in our lives, not simply empty religious ceremonies (v. 3; 1 Sam. 15:22; Mark 12:38–44). Note the emphasis on justice (vv. 3, 7, and 15).

God sees the wicked—their pride (v. 4), violence (v. 7), evil desires (v. 10), false confidence (v. 12), sinful sacrifices (v. 27), and hardness of heart (v. 29)—and He will judge them in due time.

The wicked may try to outmaneuver God, but God will have His way (v. 30; Prov. 19:21). No matter what resources men may lean on, only God can give success (v. 31). Use whatever means God provides, but put your faith in God alone.

PROVERBS 22

If you measure life by riches, you will be disappointed. God made both the rich and the poor (v. 2), and both are important to Him. (See Luke 6:20–26; James 2:1–13.)

Major on character—a good name—and not on great wealth (v. 1). Money can buy fame but not a good name. If you are proud, all you may get is money, but if you are humble, God will give honor and life along with the wealth He wants you to have (v. 4).

Do not allow debt to put you into bondage (v. 7) or the love of money to cause you to oppress others (vv. 16, 22–23). If you give gifts to the rich just to get their favor, you will end up poor.

No matter how rich or poor you may be, it is integrity that really counts. Even the king, probably the richest person in

the land, pays attention to people of character (vv. 11, 29). And do not forget the King of kings before whom you will one day stand.

◆

**Properly
View
Wealth**

The book of Proverbs issues a number of stern warnings about wealth. Wealth cannot give you peace (15:16) or wisdom (16:16), but it can create pride (18:11, 23) and trouble (15:6, 27) and friends who will not last (14:20). You should fear God (22:4) and share with others what God gives to you (11:24–25; 19:17). Watch out when somebody promises to make you rich in a hurry because those schemes backfire and leave you poor (20:21; 28:20, 22). The way to gain wealth is through hard work (10:4, 22) and faithfulness to the Lord.

◆

PROVERBS 23

The repeated “do not” reminds you that there are some things God does not want His children to do.

Do not desire luxuries (vv. 1–3), even when the rich offer them to you. You may get an appetite for such things and start living to get rich (vv. 4–5). But riches fly away, while character remains for eternity. At the same time, do not get friendly with miserly people (vv. 6–8). No matter how much they offer you, their hearts are not with you. It is not the food on the table but the love in the heart that makes fellowship real and lasting.

Do not speak carelessly around fools (v. 9), for they will misunderstand and misquote you and get you into trouble. Do not change the boundaries that men and God have made (vv. 10–11; 22:28; Deut. 19:14). This is robbery and oppression, and God will judge it.

Respect the Truth

"Buy the truth, and do not sell it" is the advice of Proverbs 23:23. Lot sold the truth for a home in the city (Gen. 13:1-13), and Esau sold the truth for a mess of pottage (Gen. 25:29-34). King Saul sold the truth for the support of the people (1 Sam. 15:24-35). Judas sold the truth for thirty pieces of silver (Matt. 26:14-16), and Pilate sold the truth for the approval of the crowd (Mark 15:15). It is not worth it!

Beware Strong Drink!

The Bible does not demand total abstinence, but it does magnify it and warn against the sin of drunkenness. Strong drink is a mocker (Prov. 20:1): it promises one thing but gives another. Instead of wealth, it gives poverty (Prov. 21:17; 23:20-21); instead of pleasure, it gives misery (Prov. 23:29-35). For a short time, the drinker feels good, but then things start to change. Alcoholics can be saved and changed by the grace of God (1 Cor. 6:9-11). You must be careful not to cause others to stumble because of the things you do (Rom. 14:14-23).

Do not fail to discipline your child (vv. 13-14), so that he or she might have wisdom and bring you joy (vv. 15-16). No mat-

ter what other families may do, do not envy sinners (vv. 17–18), but trust the Lord and obey Him. Set a good example by respecting your parents (v. 22).

Do not mix with drunkards and gluttons lest you become like them (vv. 19–21). Do not even look at the wine (vv. 29–35) lest you end up embarrassed and bruised.

Do not sell the truth at any price (v. 23)! It costs something to live by the truth, but it costs even more to abandon the truth.

PROVERBS 24

The wise person builds while others tear down (vv. 1–4) and is strong for the battles of life (vv. 5–6). There is no need to faint (v. 10); and if you fall, you need not stay down (vv. 15–16). (See Ps. 37:23–24.)

Honey

Honey was one of the sweetest things in the Jewish diet, and Solomon used it to teach some important lessons. He warned about the sweet words of the harlot (Prov. 5:3) that would lead only to bitterness. Studying may not be easy for you, but knowledge is like honey, so learn to enjoy it (Prov. 24:13–14). When people praise you, they are feeding you honey (Prov. 25:27), so do not eat too much of it! If you take too much, it will make you sick (Prov. 25:16), so learn to be satisfied without it (Prov. 27:7). You cannot live on honey, and you cannot live on praise.

The wise person seeks to deliver people who have been unjustly condemned (vv. 11–12). If you hide your head and fail to help when you can, God will judge you (James 4:17). At the

same time, be careful not to rejoice when an enemy falls (vv. 17–18), fret when the wicked prosper (vv. 19–20), or pay back those who may have hurt you (vv. 28–29).

The wise person labors while there is opportunity (v. 27) and does not live for ease and pleasure (vv. 30–34; 6:6–11). Follow the example of your Master (John 9:4).

PROVERBS 25

Leaders (1–7). People in authority must know what is going on. God has the right to conceal things, but nobody should hide things from the leader. However, a wise leader knows how to keep his counsel (v. 3) and share his plans at the right time. The wise leader gets rid of evil associates and does what is right. Verses 6–7 remind us of our Lord’s parable in Luke 14:7–8. Humility leads to honor, but self-promotion leads to shame.

Neighbors (8–19). Keep problems between you and your neighbor and try to settle them out of court (Matt. 5:21–26). Let your words be appropriate (vv. 11–12) and helpful (v. 13), and keep your promises (v. 14). Do not be a neighborhood pest (v. 17) or troublemaker (v. 18). Be dependable (v. 19)!

Enemies (21–22). Paul quoted these words in Romans 12:20, and Elisha practiced them (2 Kings 6:8–23) and so did Jesus and the early believers (Luke 22:49–51; Acts 7:59–60).

Handling Disputes

The time to stop a dispute is when it begins (Prov. 17:14; 30:32–33). As much as possible, do not let arguments get started (Prov. 20:3). Some people contribute to peace (Prov. 12:20); others contribute to war (Prov. 22:10; 26:21); and there are some people that nobody can get along with (Prov. 29:9). God blesses the peacemakers (Matt. 5:9), so let God’s wisdom direct you and use you to make peace (James 3:13–18).

PROVERBS 26

Solomon names some people you should avoid, and the first is the *fool* (vv. 1-12). You cannot change him by promotion (vv. 1, 8), correction (v. 3), or admonition (vv. 4-5). If you answer a fool, do not stoop to his level of folly or you will make him think you have elevated him to wisdom. No matter how much you correct him, he goes right back into folly (v. 11; 2 Pet. 2:22).

The second is the *sluggard* (vv. 13-16) who has excuses for everything. He has motion but no progress (v. 14) and is even too lazy to feed himself (v. 15)! You are wasting your time trying to help him (v. 16; 27:22).

The *troublemaker* (vv. 17-28) is the third problem person. This category includes meddlers (v. 17), pranksters (vv. 18-19), talebearers (vv. 20-22), and deceivers (vv. 23-28).

Are you anywhere in this chapter?

PROVERBS 27

True friendship will occasionally involve wounds (vv. 5-6) as you speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15) because friendship cannot be built on deception or envy (v. 4).

***Don't Fall
for Flattery*** *Sincere praise can be an encouragement,
but flattery only does harm (Prov. 26:28).
Beware the kisses of an enemy (Prov. 27:6;
2 Sam. 20:9-10; Matt. 26:48-50)! There
are times when flattery may seem the
only way to save a friendship, but after-
ward, you will regret it (Prov. 28:23).
The flatterer is like a hunter who spreads
his net (Prov. 29:5), so be on your guard.*

Friends should encourage each other with loving counsel (v. 9) and honest praise (v. 2). But beware flattery (v. 14)! The way you respond to praise reveals your character, just as a jeweler's furnace reveals the nature of the precious metal

(v. 21). Praise brought out the best in David but the worst in Saul (1 Sam. 18:1–16). What does it do to you?

Friends should be faithful to each other (v. 10; 17:17), but you also need to be loyal to family and neighbors (v. 10). You never can tell when you may need them or they may need you! Not everybody will become a close friend, so do not get so exclusive that you neglect other people.

“*Flattery is not communication; it is manipulation.*”

PROVERBS 28

As crime increases, the government must pass more laws and hire more people to enforce them (v. 2). When you break God's law, you promote the wicked; when you obey His law, you promote righteousness (v. 4) and enable God to answer your prayers (v. 9). Read Romans 13 and see what God says about Christian citizens.

Wicked rulers are like fierce animals (v. 15) who drive the righteous into hiding (vv. 12, 28). This includes ignorant leaders and those grasping after money (v. 16). The people in that day could not vote to replace leaders or correct laws, so all they could do was protect themselves.

When laws and leaders are unjust, usually the poor suffer and the rich profit. But even a poor person can have integrity (v. 6) and understanding (v. 11) and faith that God will meet his needs (v. 27).

Is there someone you should help today?

PROVERBS 29

When honest people enforce the law, there is joy (v. 2), and society is established with security and order (v. 4). A few leaders who scoff at the law can endanger things, so the wise must be ready to act (v. 8). Of course, even a wise leader cannot change some people (v. 9).

Leaders must act on the basis of truth and not lies (vv. 12, 14). The foundation for law is God's truth, and where that is

preached and obeyed, there will be happiness (v. 18). If leaders try to please people, or if they fear people, they will get into trouble; but if they obey the Lord, He will bless them (vv. 25-27).

Everybody must practice self-control in feelings (vv. 11, 22) and words (v. 20). We may not be able to run the government, but we can manage the kingdom within our own hearts (Prov. 16:32; 25:28).

Bribery

Bribery erodes the very foundation of the law and of the land (Prov. 29:4) and must be hated as an enemy (Prov. 15:27). It perverts justice (Prov. 17:23), provides offices for dishonest people (Prov. 18:16), purchases favors (Prov. 19:6), and pacifies people without solving problems (Prov. 21:14). The person whose integrity is for sale is not fit to govern.

PROVERBS 30

Agur's reverence for God (vv. 2-4) and His Word (vv. 5-6) proves that he was a wise man worth listening to. He had the right attitude toward wealth (vv. 7-9; Phil. 4:10) and the family (v. 17), and he was concerned about a generation that had turned away from God (vv. 11-14). He shares some lessons with you.

Some things are never satisfied (15-16). The leech wants more blood, the grave wants more dead, the barren mother yearns for children, the earth thirsts for more water, and the fire wants more fuel (Prov. 26:20-21). Dissatisfaction creates many problems in our world.

Some things must never lose their wonder (18-19). Science may explain the flight of birds, the movements of snakes, the currents of the ocean, and human sexuality, but that does not take away their wonder. Life and love are not explained by lab-

oratory experiments or the convenient formulas of the experts. As you go through life, do not lose your sense of wonder.

Some things always seem to cause trouble (21–23). Servants do not always know how to handle the luxury and authority of the throne (Prov. 19:10), so they create problems instead of solve them. Folly and hatred are not changed by food and marriage; if anything, they become worse. Genesis 16 illustrates what happens when a maidservant gets promoted.

Some small things are very big in wisdom (24–28). The ants are wise to prepare, the badgers to protect, the locusts to cooperate, and the spiders to get into the best places and hold on. Good examples for you to follow!

Some things are made for honor (29–33). The lion, greyhound, and male goat are regal because God made them that way. The dog is not a lion and the goat is not a beautiful dog, but each has its own kind of honor. The king is regal because of his office and his official trappings (such as an army). If you exalt yourself (v. 32), you will have only artificial honor. If you let God fulfill in you the purpose for which He made you, you will have true honor.

Respect in the Home

Proverbs has much to say about the home. When children walk in wisdom, they bring joy to their parents (10:1; 15:20; 17:21, 25; 19:26; 23:24–25). It is tragic when children do not respect their parents (23:22; 30:17), when they speak evil of them (20:20), waste their money with the wrong friends (28:7; 29:3), and rob their parents (28:24). Early discipline helps a child learn to respect parental authority and appreciate parental love (13:24; 19:18; 22:15).

PROVERBS 31

The book of Proverbs opens with warnings about evil women but closes with a description of a godly woman. Everything about this woman is praiseworthy.

Look at *her hands*. She is a willing worker (vv. 13, 19), and her work is fruitful (v. 31). She cooks, sews, manages real estate, and even plants a garden. Her family needs nothing, and she is generous to the poor (v. 20).

Her mouth speaks wisdom (v. 26), and she gives wise counsel to her family and friends. *Her eyes* are alert to opportunities (vv. 13, 16) and to the needs of the home (v. 27).

Most important, *her heart* is faithful to the Lord and to her husband (vv. 11–12, 30). It is no surprise that she is praised, by her children and husband (vv. 28–29) and by her works (v. 31).

Compare verse 30 with 1 Peter 3:1–6 and find out what kind of beauty really lasts.

ECCLESIASTES

His name is not mentioned in the book, but King Solomon probably wrote it. He calls himself “the Preacher,” which means “one who calls an assembly and discusses a topic.” The Greek word for “assembly” is *ekklesia* (the New Testament word for “church”), and the book’s title comes from this word. As the wisest, wealthiest, and most powerful man of his day, Solomon certainly had the opportunity and resources to do the things mentioned in Ecclesiastes.

In this book, Solomon seeks to answer the question, “Is life worth living?” First, he states the problem and argues for the negative (chaps. 1–2). Then he examines the problem from many different angles (chaps. 3–10) and argues for the positive. He concludes that life is worth living if you put God first and obey His Word (chaps. 11–12).

Called a pessimistic book, Ecclesiastes is actually realistic. Solomon looked at life and death, success and failure, time and events, and wrote some wise counsel about how to live a meaningful life in a world of contradictions and seeming futility. When viewed apart from God (“under the sun”), life is indeed “vanity” (futility); but when you live for Christ, life is never “in vain” (1 Cor. 15:58).

Six times Solomon advises you to enjoy life *now* and be grateful for God’s gifts (2:24; 3:12–15, 22; 5:18–20; 8:15; 9:7–10; 11:9–10). This is not the pleasure-seeking philosophy of the epicurean (“eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die”) but the joyful outlook of the believer who accepts life as God’s gift to enjoy and employ for His glory (1 Tim. 6:17–19).

ECCLESIASTES 1

When Solomon began his discussion, he was convinced that life was meaningless. Perhaps you feel the same way at

times and for the same reasons. When you look around, you see nature functioning as it has since creation (vv. 1–8). When you look back, you see history only repeating itself (vv. 9–11). When you look within, you find (as Solomon did) that your wisdom and experience cannot explain the mysteries of life or solve life's problems (vv. 12–18). Vanity of vanities!

Solomon's big mistake was to leave God out of the picture and forget that God has broken into creation and done new things. He stopped the sun for Joshua (Josh. 10:12) and moved it back for Hezekiah (Isa. 38:8). He opened both the sea (Exod. 14) and the river (Josh. 3) for His people. God is in charge of the world and human history, and what He does is not "vain."

Knowledge can increase sorrow *if you leave out the God of wisdom and the wisdom of God*. Satan promises knowledge apart from God (Gen. 2:17; 3:1–5), but it leads only to sin and death. Be sure to grow in grace as you grow in knowledge (2 Pet. 3:17–18), or knowledge will make you critical and cynical.

*“Nine-tenths of our unhappiness is selfishness and
is an insult cast in the face of God.”*

G. H. Morrison

ECCLESIASTES 2

God made life for enjoyment and investment (1 Tim. 6:17–19), but Solomon decided to turn it into experiment. He tested his heart with pleasure (vv. 1–3), works (vv. 4–6), and the acquisition of wealth (vv. 7–9), and he discovered that they did not satisfy. These things can bring a certain amount of enjoyment while you are doing them, but when it is all over, you feel empty (vv. 10–11). *Enjoyment without God is only entertainment, not enrichment*; you cannot live on entertainment.

At that point Solomon became cynical and hated life (vv. 12–23; see also Ps. 34:11–14; 1 Pet. 3:10–12). “Why bother to do all these things,” he asked, “when I am going to die any-

way? Who will remember me?" Paul's answer is found in 1 Corinthians 15:58 and John's in 1 John 2:17.

Instead of complaining about what you do not have, thank God for what you do have *and enjoy it* (vv. 24–26).

The Cynic

Henry Ward Beecher described a cynic as a person who "never sees a good quality in a man, and never fails to see a bad one. He is the human owl, vigilant in darkness, and blind to light, mousing for vermin, and never seeing noble game."

ECCLESIASTES 3

Balance (1–8). When life is especially difficult, we are prone to see only one side of the situation. In these statements, Solomon reminds you that God is in control of life and keeps everything balanced. You feel pain when there is bereavement, but you feel joy when there is birth. You are not always weeping, but neither are you always laughing. Job knew this principle, and it gave him strength in his trials (Job 1:21).

Beauty (9–17). It may not look like it now, but God will bring beauty out of all that happens (Rom. 8:28; Isa. 61:1–7). No matter what the seed looks like, the flower will be beautiful, so give God time to work. You were made for the eternal; in Christ, you now share eternal life, the life of God (1 John 5:9–13).

Burial (18–22). Again, Solomon faces the fact of death, as he will several times in this book. Both people and animals die and are buried, and their bodies go to the same place: the dust. The spirit of man goes to meet God (v. 21). One day, God will bring beauty even out of the dust (1 Cor. 15:35–58)! Enjoy today and thank God for all He gives you.

ECCLESIASTES 4

Have you ever wished you could just get away from it all? People get on your nerves, circumstances ruin your plans, and

the best solution to the problem seems to be to “go it alone.” But is it the best solution?

As Solomon looked at the problems of life, he saw adversity and inequality (vv. 1–6), but he realized that *nobody can make it alone*. The solitary worker may get all the profits, but he is so busy making money that he has no time to enjoy it (vv. 7–8). And how rich will he be in the grave?

There are risks in society as well as rewards, but the rewards are greater. If you fall and break a leg, or if you are in danger, you are thankful to have a friend at your side to help you (vv. 9–12). We all need times of solitude, but nobody can be independent. Life is tough enough even when we have friends to encourage us. What would it be like if we had to do it alone?

“Loneliness is the first thing which God’s eye
named not good.” (See Gen. 2:18.)

John Milton

ECCLESIASTES 5

Do not speak rashly (1–7). Your mouth can cause you to sin, especially when you pray hypocritically or make rash promises to God. Hasty words and lying words do not please God, nor will He accept excuses when you fail to keep your vow. Do not live in a dream world of religious fantasy, expressed by words alone. Be honest with God (1 John 1:5–10).

Do not marvel at wrongs (8–9). This does not mean that you should *approve* them, but do not be surprised when they happen. The poor Jews in Solomon’s day had to put up with selfish bureaucrats who had to be paid off before they would help. (Have times changed?) Certainly you should work to see that justice is done, but do not be disappointed if many of your efforts fail.

Do not covet wealth (10–20). The poor think all their problems will be solved with more money, and the rich have problems because of their money! Money does not satisfy (v. 10) or guarantee peace (v. 12). You can buy sleep, but you cannot buy

peace. Be thankful that God not only shares His gifts with you but also enables you to enjoy them. Not everybody can do that.

“O God, give us serenity to accept what cannot be changed, courage to change what should be changed, and wisdom to distinguish the one from the other.”

Reinhold Niebuhr

ECCLESIASTES 6

Accept what you have. Instead of looking around for something different (v. 9), accept what you now have as God's gift. This does not suggest laziness or resignation because God expects you to make good use of what He gives you (Matt. 25:14-30).

Enjoy what you have. How tragic to have riches and a long life but not be able to enjoy them! The poor man wishes for more while the rich man wishes he could enjoy even a part of what he has (Prov. 15:16-17).

Enjoy what you have TODAY. Life passes by like a shadow, and you do not know the future (v. 12). In the will of God, make the most of today's opportunities and blessings, and you will be ready for what lies ahead.

“A man is rich in proportion to the number of things he can afford to let alone.”

Henry David Thoreau

ECCLESIASTES 7

The better life (1-12). The better life involves some “bitter things,” such as sorrow and rebuke, but the bitter things can

make life better. On the day of your birth, you were given a name. On the day of your death, that name will be either putrid or fragrant, depending on how you lived. If you have a good name, your death will be better than your birth *because nothing will be able to hurt your name*. In that sense, the end is better than the beginning (v. 8). Sorrow and rebuke can teach you lessons that will not be learned any other way (Prov. 27:5–6, 12).

The balanced life (13–24). God gives both prosperity and adversity, and He knows how much and how long. Instead of peering into the future (v. 14b), live in the present and learn to profit from both pain and pleasure (Phil. 4:10–13). In verses 16–17, Solomon did not suggest that you play it safe and get the best of both worlds. The tenses of the verbs in Hebrew give the meaning, “Do not claim to be righteous and wise.” You are still on the way and have not arrived yet (Phil. 3:12–16). That is why God balances your life with trials and triumphs: to keep you from getting proud and set in your ways.

How Do You React?

Solomon recommends that you “do not take to heart everything people say” (Eccles. 7:21). Proud people are alert to what others say about them and quick to react and retaliate. This keeps the fires burning and robs everybody of peace and joy. Charles Spurgeon advises, “You cannot stop people’s tongues, and therefore the best thing to do is to stop your own ears and never mind what is spoken.”

ECCLESIASTES 8

You will not always get things your way, so learn to deal wisely with disagreements. A shining face is better than a stern (impudent) face, and it is wisdom that makes the face shine. Learn to smile—and to laugh!

As much as possible, submit to authority, do what you are told, and keep your promises. Do not get angry and resign, but do not be a partner in anything wrong: "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). Wise people have discernment and know the right time to speak and to act (v. 6; James 1:5).

There are many injustices (vv. 10–13) and mysteries (vv. 14–17) in this life. Leave them with God and do what He calls you to do. There are still many enjoyable things in life *if* you do not make yourself the most important person to be pleased. Put God first and serve others, and life will become meaningful and joyful.

*“To consider persons and events and situations only
in the light of their effect upon myself is to
live on the doorstep of hell.”*

Thomas Merton

ECCLESIASTES 9

Death is a fact of life. You can avoid thinking about it, but you cannot avoid the appointment (Heb. 9:27). The only way to be prepared for death is to receive God's gift of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ (John 3:16; Rom. 6:23; 1 John 5:9–13), and then obey God's will until He calls you.

The reality of death need not rob you of the enjoyments of life. God wants you to enjoy feasts (vv. 7–8) and family (v. 9) and the work He has called you to do (v. 10). Life is unpredictable (v. 11), but it need not be irrational. Let God give you wisdom to use each day profitably for His glory (vv. 16–18). The thought of death should energize you, not paralyze you (Phil. 1:19–26; 2 Tim. 4:6–8).

ECCLESIASTES 10

The wiser you are, the more damage even a little folly can do to both your character and your reputation. The world

seems to honor the fool and humiliate the honorable (vv. 5-7), but that is no reason for you to permit even a little folly in your life.

In Bible times, the right hand stood for honor and the left hand for dishonor (Matt. 25:33, 41). Verse 2 is another way of saying what Solomon wrote in Proverbs 4:23. If you guard your heart, you will avoid folly in your work (vv. 8-10) and your words (vv. 11-14). Verse 10 is Solomon's version of, "Don't work harder, work smarter!" Don't lose your cutting edge!

Leaders who live for themselves are only wasting time, resources, and opportunities for service, and that is folly (vv. 16-19). Yes, they have a good time at the expense of the citizens, but eventually, their folly will catch up with them.

Are there any "dead flies" that need to be taken out of the perfume of your life?

ECCLESIASTES 11

Live by faith (1-2). Solomon owned a fleet of merchant ships (1 Kings 9:26-28) that helped add to his great wealth. Life is like that: you have to launch out by faith if you hope to get anywhere. Limiting yourself to one ship may lead to disaster, so trust God to guide you in several endeavors.

Avoid excuses (3-5). The weather is rarely right for what the farmer wants to do, but he does it anyway. You cannot explain the growth of the unborn child, but that does not stop people from having families!

Work hard (6-8). Get started early in the morning, and keep in mind that night is coming "when no one can work" (John 9:4). You will get older and one day not be able to work as much, so use your opportunities while you can. If dawn is sweet to you, your sleep at night will be sweet (Eccles. 5:12).

*“One must wait until the evening to see how
splendid the day has been.”*

Sophocles

Please God (9–10). The best way to remove sorrow is to avoid evil and walk in the fear of the Lord. The sooner you start, the happier your life will be. Childhood and youth are transient; you have but a short time to lay those important foundations. But it is never too late to make a new beginning and do it right.

ECCLESIASTES 12

What are your days like at this stage in life?

Days of decline (1–8). Solomon makes one last plea: make use of your opportunities while you can, before you get old and the storms come (v. 2). This poetic description of old age is quite graphic: trembling limbs and poor vision (v. 3); deafness and nervousness (v. 4); fear, gray hair, loss of appetite and then—death (vv. 5–7; 2 Cor. 4:16–18).

Days of learning (9–12). Listen to what God says and be admonished, no matter how old you are. You are never too old to get wiser—or to act like a fool! You can read many books about many subjects, but major on understanding God's Word and living a life of wisdom. His words are like nails: you can depend on them. They are goads: they prod you to do His will.

Days of obedience (13–14). If you fear God, you need fear nothing else; you are safe in the Father's will. So live that God could publish a book about you and you would not be ashamed for the whole world to read it. Live with eternity in view, and the ravages of time will not distress you.

THE SONG OF SOLOMON

Jewish tradition sees this book picturing Jehovah's love for Israel, and Christians see it illustrating Christ's love for the church (Eph. 5:23-33) as well as the individual believer (John 14:21-24).

The "plot" centers on King Solomon's love for a humble maiden. Courtship (1:1-3:5) leads to marriage (3:6-5:1) and then to the joys and trials of married love (5:2-8:14). The book is indeed a beautiful presentation of the love of husband and wife, for the Jews accepted sexuality as a precious gift from God, a holy expression of true commitment in marriage.

The Song of Solomon is also an expression of the love relationship of the believer and the Savior. Christ calls us away from the trivial things of life that we might enjoy a deeper communion with Him. This communion is not without difficulties and disciplines, but it leads to a happier and holier life.

“The historical books I may compare to the outer courts of the temple; the gospels, the epistles and the psalms bring us into the holy place, or the court of the priests; but the Song of Solomon is the most holy place—the holy of holies, before which the veil still hangs to many an untaught believer.”

Charles Haddon Spurgeon

As you read the Song of Solomon, be sure to distinguish the various people speaking. Many recent translations of the Bible, such as the New King James Version, will identify them for you. Also keep in mind that this is a poem for mature people. It is rich in Oriental imagery and must be “felt” as well as read. Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes for the inquiring mind, Proverbs for the obedient will, and the Song of Solomon for the loving heart. It takes all three for a balanced life.

SONG OF SOLOMON 1

Christ loves you, no matter what you may see in yourself (vv. 5–6, 8, 15). Be sure that your love for Him is expressed in both words (vv. 2–3, 16) and deeds (John 14:21–24). Spend time with Him and enjoy His love as you would food and drink (vv. 2, 12) and the fragrance of sweet perfume (vv. 3, 12–13; John 12:1–8).

Your love relationship must never become stagnant because He wants to lead you into deeper experiences in His chambers (v. 4) and His banquet hall (2:4). Never be afraid to follow Him, for His love will never lead you astray. Enjoyment and enrichment will be yours as you commune with Him.

At the same time, never neglect your work (v. 6); faithful service is one way you show Him your love. You do not choose between Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38–42), for both service and devotion belong to the balanced Christian life. Also, do not allow yourself to become isolated from others. Follow His flock and His footsteps and you will walk in paths of loving fellowship (John 21:15–25).

“*Love is the greatest thing that God can give us; for Himself is love: and it is the greatest thing we can give to God.*”

Jeremy Taylor

SONG OF SOLOMON 2

As you grow in your love for Christ, you must expect a variety of experiences, both pleasant and painful. You will enjoy His shade (v. 3), His banquets (vv. 4–5), and His tender expressions of love (v. 6). But you must also expect mountains (v. 8), walls (v. 9), winter seasons (v. 11), and enemies that creep in and try to destroy your work (v. 15).

You never know when your Lord will come to you for a time of communion, so be ever alert. When you least expect it, He will come (v. 8), stand (v. 9), look (v. 9), and speak (v. 10). No obstacle stands between Him and you *except the ones you put up yourself*. He leaps over the mountains because He yearns to be with you and lift you higher (v. 14).

When you spend time in loving communion with Christ, it is like springtime after the winter (vv. 10–13) and the dawning of a new day (v. 17).

“Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee”

*Jesus, the very thought of Thee
With sweetness fills my breast;
But sweeter far Thy face to see,
And in Thy bosom rest.*

*When once Thou visitest the heart
Then truth begins to shine,
Then earthly vanities depart,
Then kindles love divine.*

Twelfth-century Latin hymn,
attributed to Bernard of
Clairvaux; translated by
Edward Caswall

SONG OF SOLOMON 3

Seeking (1-3). There are times when the Lord comes to you (2:8), but there are also times when you should seek Him. It was not easy for her to leave the comfort and security of the bed for the danger of the street, but love cannot rest until it finds its beloved. Do you have that kind of love?

Finding (4-5). She was not satisfied with information from the watchmen; she wanted personal communion with her beloved. It is not enough merely to listen to what others say about Jesus, as helpful as that may be. Press on until you enjoy Him personally.

Enjoying (6-11). In a triumphant and beautiful wedding procession, Solomon claims his bride and takes her home. The church is awaiting the Lord's glorious coming, but as we wait, we experience His love and joy (vv. 10-11; John 15:9-11). Find your delight in Him today and the joys of heaven will be greater.

SONG OF SOLOMON 4

Do you want to experience His love?

Listen to His words (1-8). He wants to tell you how fair you are in His sight because of His grace (Eph. 1:6). If you listen to what others say about you, you may be led astray, and if you listen to yourself, you may become discouraged. Believe His Word and rest in His love. Let your heart listen for His voice.

Look to Him in love (9-11). You cannot see Him physically, but you can still love Him (1 Pet. 1:8). See Him in His Word, in the world He has made, and in His providential care for you each day. Tell Him that you love Him!

Live to please Him (12-16). A garden, spring, and fountain are not useful if they are shut up, so open your life to Him and let Him bring out of you all that will delight Him and help others. Sometimes He must send trials to bring out the best blessings (v. 16). You are His unique garden and He is the loving Gardener (John 20:15), and He will cultivate your life and make it fruitful as you commune with Him (John 15:1-8).

When the Lord comes to your garden, let Him enjoy your love (5:1; John 20:11-18).

SONG OF SOLOMON 5

No matter where you are or what you are doing, fix your heart on the Lord and keep alert to His voice. You never know when He may come to have fellowship with you.

When He comes, He will speak and knock, *and you must respond to Him immediately*. No excuses! She heard his knock and his voice, and she saw his hand, but she did not yield to his call. When finally she opened the door, he was gone, even though he left a token blessing behind (v. 5). Better to have your beloved than any blessing he might give.

A loving heart will seek the Lord, no matter what the cost (vv. 6-8). How much better it would have been for her to respond to Him when she first heard His call. But she does not blame her Beloved; she gladly tells others how wonderful He is (vv. 10-16).

An affectionate heart is an alert heart, quick to respond to the Beloved's calls.

SONG OF SOLOMON 6

The friends of the bride noticed that her Beloved was missing, and they asked about Him (v. 1). Often others can tell when we are out of fellowship with the Lord. Of course, we know where He is (v. 2) and what we must do to be reconciled to Him (1 John 1:9). We know that we belong to Him (v. 3) and that He still loves us and sees beauty in us (vv. 4-10) in spite of our lack of loving response. Contrast verse 3 with 2:16 and 7:10.

The bride went where her beloved was (v. 11) that she might be forgiven and restored. If we are to be reconciled to him and enjoy his communion once more, we must go back to the place where we left him (Gen. 13:3). Instead of being beaten (5:7), she is now in his glorious triumphal procession (vv. 10-12; 2 Cor. 2:14), sitting regally in the lead chariot!

Her friends begged her to remain that they might enjoy her beauty (v. 13). Do God's people today impress the world with their beauty and Christlikeness? Perhaps we need to meet the Beloved in His garden.

SONG OF SOLOMON 7

He admires you (1-5). Once more, the Beloved tells His wife how attractive she is to Him. This reminds us that husbands and wives need to express their love to each other often and find their joy freely in each other. Perhaps we would use different similes today, but each of these descriptions was meaningful in that day.

“I ask you, Lord Jesus, to develop in me, your lover, an immeasurable urge towards you, an affection that is unbounded, a longing that is unrestrained, a fervor that throws discretion to the winds! . . . There is no one more blessed than he who dies because he loves so much. No creature can love God too much.”

Richard Rolle

Lovely Feet

We do not usually think of feet as attractive parts of the body (Song of Sol. 7:1), but our Lord wants us to have beautiful feet, spiritually speaking. Our feet should be clean (John 13:1-11) and shod (Luke 15:22; Eph. 6:15) and busy carrying the good news of salvation (Isa. 52:7; Rom. 10:15). Defiled feet and disobedient feet will grieve His heart and make it difficult for Him to fellowship with us as He desires.

He desires you (6–13). What incredible love that He should want to share His life with sinners such as we are (1 John 3:1)! Verse 10 is an improvement over 2:16 and 6:3, for it focuses on His desire for us and not just on our relationship with Him. Ask Him to go with you to some special place where you can give Him your love (vv. 11–13). There are times when He invites you (2:10ff.), but He enjoys it when you invite Him.

SONG OF SOLOMON 8

Imagining love (1–2). When you love someone, you think about that person and imagine all kinds of wonderful experiences together. But true love cannot remain only in the mind; it has to be fulfilled in life. An imaginary love for Christ is fatal to a vital Christian life.

Experiencing love (3–5). Your love for Him must be a living and growing experience, not something you manufacture yourself. You can commune with Him in private worship, lean on Him in the wilderness, and enjoy Him in the field. Everywhere, He awaits your affection.

Cherishing love (6–7). Solomon used three images to illustrate true love. The seal speaks of ownership, two lovers belonging only to each other until separated by death. This is the permanence of love. The fire reminds us of the power of love—nothing can quench it. And the wealth illustrates the preciousness of love.

Protecting love (8–11). The picture is that of a family, protecting a young daughter until she is old enough to marry. If she is a “door” (open to everybody), she must be protected, but if she is a “wall,” she has the integrity to protect herself.

Listening for love (12–14). The Savior listens for your voice (v. 13; 2:14), and you must listen for His voice (2:8; 5:2). He will speak to you through His Word and by His Holy Spirit, so be attentive.

ISAIAH

The book of Isaiah may be compared to the whole Bible because it has two parts, like the two testaments. In the Old Testament section (chaps. 1–39), the prophet condemns the sins of Judah and warns of coming judgment. In the New Testament section (chaps. 40–66), he prophesies Judah's deliverance from Babylonian captivity. Throughout both sections, he announces the establishment of God's glorious kingdom. The first section primarily highlights law and condemnation, while the second emphasizes grace and glorious redemption. "The Holy One of Israel" is one of Isaiah's favorite names for the Lord.

The name *Isaiah* means "the salvation of Jehovah," and the prophet deals with four different kinds of salvation: (1) Judah's national salvation from the attacks of other nations; (2) Judah's salvation from the Babylonian captivity; (3) the future salvation of the Jews when their kingdom is established; and (4) the personal salvation of the sinner who puts his faith in the Redeemer.

Isaiah prophesied seven hundred years before Christ, in a period of international tension. Egypt, Syria, Israel (the northern kingdom), Babylon, and Assyria had their eyes on Judah, and the leaders of Judah tried to play one nation against another in their attempt to avoid war. Isaiah warned them not to trust in politics but to trust the Lord and obey His Word. The leaders did not listen, and Judah was eventually taken captive by Babylon. Isaiah's book guided and comforted the exiles both during and after their captivity.

As you read this book, you will see how believers should respond to international conflicts, political decay in the nation, and religious decay among the people, including the religious leaders. Isaiah ministered at a time when "religion" was popular but not spiritual, and the ministry at the temple was

only a formality. The nation as a whole was corrupt, but God had His faithful remnant just as He does today.

Tradition says that the prophet Isaiah was sawed in half by King Manasseh. Hebrews 11:37 is said to refer to his death.

ISAIAH 1

Isaiah had access to four different kings, but his great concern was the spiritual state of the nation and not the political success of the leaders. There is a place for diplomacy and political action, for God established human government; but the leaders' faith must be in God's truth and not in man's schemes.

Outwardly, the nation seemed prosperous and even religious, but God saw a different picture. His people were rebellious children, lower than animals (vv. 1-3). They were sick with sin, like lepers (vv. 4-6), and their "garden city" had become another Sodom and Gomorrah (vv. 7-9).

Their popular religious meetings were futile and a grief to the Lord (vv. 10-15). In fact, their religious activities defiled the people instead of making them clean (vv. 16-20; Matt. 23:25-28). The wife of Jehovah was now a harlot (v. 21); their treasures were now cheap (vv. 22-26); and their garden was destined to be destroyed by fire (vv. 27-31).

Sin breaks God's heart, cheapens a nation or an individual, and invites the judgment of God. God graciously offers His forgiveness if we will repent (vv. 18-20).

The Virtue of Cleanliness

It is good to pray, "Wash me" (Ps. 51:7), but keep in mind that God says, "Wash yourselves" (Isa. 1:16). Paul wrote, "Let us cleanse ourselves" (2 Cor. 7:1). Follow that advice and keep yourself clean!

ISAIAH 2

The house of the Lord (1-4). In the previous chapter, Isaiah looked *within* the heart of the nation; now he looks *ahead* to

the future glorious kingdom God promised His people. Instead of being a place for corrupt worship, the temple will be a center of truth and blessing for Jews and Gentiles. Instead of international conflict, there will be peace. When world conditions distress you, remember that things will not always be like this.

The light of the Lord (5–9). Judah was borrowing new religious ideas from the gentile nations and not walking in God's truth. Their faith was in material progress and not in the Lord. How they needed to get back to the light of God's Word! In our own day, astrology and Eastern religions have replaced the Bible, and making money is more important than serving the Lord.

The day of the Lord (10–22). This is a time of judgment from the Lord that can apply locally, as with Judah, or worldwide, as in the end times. Man's pride will be brought low, and all that man lives for will be destroyed. God patiently waits as people rebel against the truth, but in the end, sin will be judged and the Lord will be exalted (vv. 11, 17). God will protect His believing remnant when that day of judgment comes (1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9–10).

ISAIAH 3

The leaders of Judah trusted substitutes that would not help them in the coming day of judgment: natural resources, material wealth, military might, political experience, and even "religion" (vv. 1–3). God would take away in His wrath everything that dethroned Him in the hearts of the people.

But that was not all. God would replace their proud leaders with weaklings, nobodies without ability, who would oppress the people (vv. 4–8). Why? Because the nation not only sinned but boasted about it openly!

Isaiah was especially grieved because the women of the land had become addicted to wealth and fashion and were more interested in social status than spiritual character. The day would come when their artificial glamour would be gone and they would be sitting in the dust. (See 1 Pet. 3:1–6.) So many men would die in the coming war that the women would do anything to get a husband (Isa. 4:1).

Beware living on substitutes!

ISAIAH 4

"In that day" refers to the coming kingdom when the Lord will be exalted (Isa. 2:11, 17). Isaiah looked beyond the impending crisis to the glory that one day would come to Israel.

It will be a day of glory and not shame as Jesus Christ (the "Branch of the LORD" [Isa. 11:1; Jer. 33:15]) reigns on earth (v. 2). It will be a time when the nation will be washed and sanctified (vv. 5-6) and *every home* on Mount Zion will become a "tabernacle of God" with the distinctive pillar of glory above it (Exod. 40:34ff.).

But why should we wait for these blessings when God can give them to us now? He will wash us clean (Isa. 1:18), set us apart for Himself, and bless us in our homes with His presence. Perhaps it is time we followed Vance Havner's advice and started living "in kingdom come."

ISAIAH 5

This chapter contains a song (vv. 1-7), a lament (vv. 8-23), and a judgment (vv. 24-30).

The nation of Israel is the vineyard for which God did so much (Matt. 21:33-46). The people's sin was ingratitude, taking their blessings for granted and using them selfishly. Instead of serving the Lord, they served themselves, and the result was a corrupted nation.

The lament names some specific sins of the nation ("wild grapes" [v. 2]), sins that people still commit today. The rich stole from the poor (vv. 8-10), and people lived for sensual pleasure rather than godly enrichment (vv. 11-17). Confident of their own wisdom (v. 21), they questioned God's counsel (vv. 18-19) and for a price changed His words (vv. 20-23). There was no justice in the land because evil leaders turned from the truth of God's Word.

God was angry; His hand of judgment was stretched out against His people (v. 25; 9:12, 17, 21; 10:4; 14:27). Judgment comes like a prairie fire (v. 24) when the invading army conquers the land (vv. 26-30).

Today, He stretches out His hands in love, inviting sinners to repent (Isa. 65:2; Rom. 10:21); but tomorrow, He will stretch them out in wrath.

Significant Vines

There are three symbolic vines in Scripture. The past vine is Israel (Ps. 80; Isa. 3:14; 5:1-7; Jer. 2:21; 12:10; Ezek. 15; Hos. 10:1). The present vine is Christ and His church (John 15). The future vine is "the vine of the earth," the corrupt world system of the last days that is destined for judgment (Rev. 14:14-20).

ISAIAH 6

Sight: he saw the Lord (1-4). Isaiah had a life-changing vision of Jesus Christ (John 12:38-41). The throne of Judah had changed occupants, but God was still on His throne and in perfect control of everything. When you worship, focus on God's holiness, sovereignty, and glory. When things on earth are discouraging, start looking at things from heaven's point of view.

Insight: he saw himself (5-7). Isaiah had pronounced woes on other people, but now he cried, "Woe is me!" He admitted that he was a sinner, he confessed his sin, and the Lord cleansed him. Were it not for the sacrifice on the altar, we could never approach the Sovereign on the throne.

His Majesty

"Men are never duly touched and impressed with a conviction of their insignificance, until they have contrasted themselves with the majesty of God," wrote John Calvin. This was true not only of Isaiah but also of Job (Job 42:5-6), Daniel (Dan. 10:16-17), Peter (Luke 5:8), and John (Rev. 1:17).

Vision: he saw the need (8–13). True worship leads to service. You hear God's call, and you respond with obedience. God did not send Isaiah to a receptive people or give him an easy message to preach. But when you have seen the Lord and felt His touch, you can obey His will without fear.

He Shall Be Immanuel

Isaiah 7–12 is sometimes called the "Book of Immanuel" (Isa. 7:14; 8:8, 10). Immanuel means "God with us." God gave this prophecy to the whole "house of David" (Isa. 7:13) and not just to King Ahaz; it refers ultimately to the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 1:18–25). He is God, and He is "God with us."

ISAIAH 7

Fear. King Ahaz was frightened (vv. 2, 4, 16) because Syria and Israel united to depose him and crown a new king in Judah. Assyria and Egypt were also on the move, so it was not an encouraging time. When circumstances threaten you, what do you do? Alas, Ahaz trusted in his own wisdom and made a treaty with the king of Assyria, only to see him break it.

Faith. Isaiah's word to the king was from God and could be trusted. Ahaz pretended to be very spiritual when he refused to ask a sign, but his rejection of the sign was actually a rejection of the Lord and His messenger. God's Word goes to work when we believe it and act on it. Ahaz only talked about it!

Fulfillment. Both Syria and Israel were eventually out of the picture as Isaiah had promised, but Assyria became the new threat. Israel was invaded by Assyria in 722 B.C., and the nation came to an end. The Assyrians invaded Judah in the days of King Hezekiah, but God defeated them. However, Assyria humbled Judah because God's people would not trust God's Word. It is *faith* in God, not faith in man's treaties, that brings the victory.

Isaiah the Evangelical

Isaiah is called "the evangelical prophet" because he says so much about Jesus Christ. Isaiah writes about His birth (7:14; Matt. 1:23); the ministry of John the Baptist (40:1-6; Matt. 3); His own ministry in the Spirit (61:1-2; Luke 4:17-19); His rejection by the nation (6:9-13; Matt. 13:10-15; John 12:38); the Stone of stumbling (8:14; 28:16; Matt. 21:42; Rom. 9:32-33; 1 Pet. 2:6); His ministry to the Gentiles (49:6; Luke 2:32; Acts 13:47); His future kingdom (11:1-9; Rev. 12:10); and His atoning death on the cross (53:1ff.; Mark 10:25).

Jesus' Birth

The virgin birth of Jesus Christ is a basic doctrine of the Christian faith, for the Son of God could never be born as you were born. Every baby is a new creation, but Jesus Christ existed from eternity. He was not only born, but He "came into the world" (John 3:17; 10:36; 16:28). According to Isaiah 9:6, the Child was born (His human nature) and the Son was given (His divine nature). The holy Son of God could not partake of sinful human nature. His body was miraculously conceived by the Holy Spirit in Mary's womb (Luke 1:26-38; Heb. 10:5). He did no sin (1 Pet. 2:22); "in Him there is no sin" (1 John 3:5); He knew no sin (2 Cor. 5:21). Hallelujah, what a Savior!

ISAIAH 8

Two rivers (1–10). The lengthy name in verse 1 means “Speed to the spoil! Hasten to the booty!” It refers to the victory Assyria would win over Syria (Damascus) and Israel (Samaria). This would give Assyria a clear path to Judah, so Ahaz’s treaty did not work. He rejected the quiet waters of Shiloah (a reference to a spring in Jerusalem) for the flood waters of the Euphrates (a reference to Assyria). God’s wisdom brings peace, but man’s wisdom brings confusion (James 3:13–18).

Two fears (11–15). If you fear God, you need not fear the threats of men. Make Jesus Lord in your life, and He will take care of your fears (1 Pet. 3:13–17). Christ is the Stone of refuge for His people but a snare to those who reject Him.

Two authorities (16–22). The Word of God is the only authority for the believer, even if circumstances seem to challenge it. In Isaiah’s day, the leaders were even consulting mediums (Deut. 18:10–12)! Let the Word be your light in this dark world (Ps. 119:105).

ISAIAH 9

What a difference it makes in our lives that Jesus Christ came and died for our sins! And what a difference it will make in this world when He comes to sit on David’s throne and rule righteously!

Jesus is the difference between light and darkness, life and death (v. 2). He is also the difference between joy and sorrow, freedom and bondage (vv. 3–4). As you wait for His return, be sure the government of your life is on His shoulders. Let Him be to you all that His names proclaim, for every name that He bears is a blessing that He shares.

The proud will be judged (vv. 8–21), as was Israel (the northern kingdom) when Assyria took the nation captive. First, God chastened them in love; and when they would not submit, He judged them (vv. 13–14). They were led astray by the very people who should have led them in the right way (v. 16; Lam. 4:13).

Our God is a God of grace and truth (John 1:17). If you acknowledge His truth, you can receive His grace (Ps. 51:3–4); but if you reject His truth, His hand of judgment must be stretched out to you. Which will it be?

ISAIAH 10

Greed (1-4). The leaders in Israel were greedy for gain. They used unjust laws to support their selfish practices as they robbed the poor and needy. Just before God's judgment fell on the nation, the rich were prospering and the poor languishing. "What will you do in the day of punishment?" (v. 3) is a question we all must answer. What good is all your wealth if you are not prepared to meet God?

Pride (5-19). Assyria was God's tool for punishing Israel (vv. 5, 15), but the tool cannot boast about what it does. Assyria was proud of its conquests, so God had to humble its people and judge them for their evil deeds. The army would vanish like trees in a forest fire. Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, was conquered by Babylon in 612 B.C. Nations may boast, but God has the last word.

Hope (20-34). In His grace, God saved a remnant and permitted them to return to the land. God also promised Judah that Assyria would not capture Jerusalem (vv. 24-27; Isa. 37). The tall proud tree (Assyria) would be cut down to size (vv. 33-34)! Even in the midst of wrath, God gives His people hope.

ISAIAH 11-12

Reign (11:1-10). God cuts down the tall trees (Isa. 10:33-34), but He builds a great kingdom from a tiny shoot (v. 1). Our Savior had a humble beginning at a time when David's family was in dishonor; but in the end, His kingdom will prevail over all earthly powers. He will bring peace on earth and the glory of God will cover the earth. Are you praying, "Thy kingdom come"?

Return (11:11-16). The humble Root is now the leader of an army! He defeats the enemy and gathers His people to their land, and He also rallies the Gentiles who seek Him. It is the picture of another "exodus" as God dries up the waters and makes a highway for His people. But this time there will be no wilderness wandering!

Rejoicing (12:1-6). Worshiping people give thanks to the Lord for saving them and bringing them home again. Witnessing people tell all the nations of the greatness of God. Compare verse 2 with Exodus 15:2 and Psalm 118:14, and be sure to believe this "song" for yourself.

ISAIAH 13

In chapters 13–23, Isaiah announces God's judgment on ten gentile peoples as well as on His own people in Judah and Israel. He begins with Babylon, which would one day swallow up the Assyrians, take Judah captive and then itself be defeated by the Medes and Persians (vv. 17–22). The rise and the fall of nations are in the hands of God (Dan. 4:25, 32; Acts 17:26). God can even use heathen soldiers to do His work and can call them "My sanctified ones" (v. 3). He is sovereign.

In the defeat of Babylon, Isaiah saw a picture of the final "day of the Lord" when the world will taste the judgment of God. God is long-suffering with sinners, but there comes a time when His judgment must fall. Isaiah's message against Babylon was fulfilled, and the city and empire are no more.

In Scripture, Babylon symbolizes the world system confederated against God (Gen. 11). Like Babylon in Isaiah's day, the world today seems so successful and invincible; but one day, the whole system will fall (Rev. 17–18). That is why God calls His people to separate themselves from it (2 Cor. 6:14–18).

ISAIAH 14

There is more to the fall of Babylon than the deposing of a proud king (vv. 3–11, 16–21) or the destroying of a great city (vv. 22–23). Behind the evil Babylonian system was Lucifer ("Day Star"), the enemy of God (vv. 12–15). As God taunts the king of Babylon, He also speaks to Satan who motivated and energized him.

It appears that Lucifer was an angel who rebelled against God and wanted to take to himself the worship that belonged only to God. "I will be like the Most High" (v. 14) is the ambition of the evil one and the temptation he puts before man (Gen. 3:5). The world today worships and serves "the creature rather than the Creator" (Rom. 1:25). Man is his own god; in worshiping and serving only himself, he plays right into the hands of the evil one.

The Christian's ambition is to be like Jesus Christ in all things, "conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom. 8:29). Contrast Isaiah 14:12–15 with Philippians 2:1–11 if you want to see the difference between Satan's approach and our Lord's approach.

ISAIAH 15—16

The nation of Moab was born out of Lot's incestuous union with one of his daughters (Gen. 19:30-38). It was a proud nation that would not honor the God of Israel but trusted in its fortifications. Pride is a sin that God hates (Prov. 6:16-17), whether in nations or in individuals, and it leads to judgment.

When the Assyrians invaded, the Moabites turned from boasting to weeping (15:1-4) and fleeing (15:5-9). They had faith in their fortifications, but everything failed them. Contrast this with Isaiah 2:10-11. They should have made peace with Judah (16:1-2) and gone to Jerusalem for asylum. God had promised to protect Judah from the Assyrian army (10:24ff.) because that was where David's throne was (16:5).

The prophet looked beyond this event to the time when the Son of God would sit on David's throne and bring in righteousness and justice (16:5). God could do without Moab; but He had a covenant with David (2 Sam. 7), and He would be faithful to His promises. Judah was safe because the people trusted the Lord.

ISAIAH 17

The northern kingdom of Israel had allied with Syria (Damascus), and both would fall to the Assyrians. If the people you trust do not trust the Lord, their judgment may become your judgment.

God's judgment on Israel is pictured by a sunset and a heavy person losing weight (v. 4), as well as a field that has no fruit for the gleaners (vv. 5-6). Israel had decayed beyond hope, and all her efforts at recovery were wasted (vv. 10-11).

If only they had turned to God before the sun set or the disease wasted away the body or the blight destroyed the harvest! But they trusted their own idols and not the true God (vv. 7-8). How easy it is to put confidence in the work of your own hands and not in the God who made those hands!

The judgment carried them off, like houses before a flood (vv. 12-13a) or chaff and tumbleweeds before the wind (v. 13b). Israel could have had the quiet waters of Shiloah (8:6), but they chose the turbulent waters of Assyria.

The will of God is your greatest security.

ISAIAH 18

The people of Ethiopia (ancient Cush) sent ambassadors to Israel, hoping to form a strong alliance against Assyria, but the venture was doomed to fail. God was not in it, because all of man's clever ideas are worthless if they run contrary to the will of God (1 Cor. 3:18-20). First find His will, then do it!

The Assyrian invasion was God's plan, and He would not intervene until He accomplished His divine purposes. He would hover over the scene like summer heat or the morning dew (vv. 3-4). When the time was right, He would reap the harvest (v. 5) and leave the corpses to the scavengers (v. 6). It is not a very pretty scene, but that is the way civilization is moving today (Matt. 24:28; Rev. 19:17-21).

Those clean-shaven ambassadors should have gone to Jerusalem with a gift for the Lord. They should have been humble worshipers, not haughty negotiators (v. 7), and trusted the God of Israel, not their armies or treaties (Ps. 20:7).

ISAIAH 19

A strong faction in Judah advised the king to get help from Egypt (Isa. 31), but Isaiah warned that Egypt could not help them. Why? Because the Lord had discouraged and divided the Egyptians (vv. 1-2), their counsel was from the devil (v. 3), and they were heading for bondage themselves (v. 4). Furthermore, their economy was about to fail (vv. 5-10). How could they help?

The counselors in Egypt were supposed to be very wise, but God said they were deluded fools (vv. 11-13). God's people get their wisdom from God, not from the world (James 1:5). The wisdom of Egypt would lead them into staggering and humiliating defeat (vv. 14-15).

In verses 16-25, the prophet sees the future of both the Jews and the Egyptians, when the Lord will establish His kingdom. The situation will be reversed, with Egypt turning to Israel for help (vv. 16-17)! In fact, the Egyptians will worship the God of Israel (vv. 18-21)! The nations will no longer battle but will visit one another on God's highway.

Going Down to Egypt

When Abraham faced a famine in Canaan, he went down to Egypt for help, and he almost lost his wife (Gen. 12:10—13:4). After the Exodus, God led His people so they would not want to go back to Egypt (Exod. 13:17–22). During their wilderness wanderings, the people wanted to go back (Num. 11; 14), but God would not permit it. Isaiah warned against it (32:1ff.), and so did Jeremiah (42–43). The book of Hebrews uses this image to warn believers not to go back in unbelief but to go forward in faith (3:7–19; 6:1).

ISAIAH 20

This brief chapter records two object lessons that the Lord used to try to convince the people not to form unholy alliances.

The first was the defeat of Ashdod by the Assyrians. The people of this Philistine city had depended on Egypt and Ethiopia to help them, but their help failed. Why then should God's people trust Egypt and Ethiopia? Remember, the one thing we learn from history is that we do not learn from history. "It can't happen here!"

The second object lesson was personified by Isaiah the prophet who for three years did not wear his prophetic garb or his sandals. He looked like a prisoner of war, which is what the Egyptians and Ethiopians eventually became (vv. 3–4). God's people did not take it to heart, and eventually they were led off to Babylon.

God uses things we see and hear to help us make the right decisions. Do we really pay attention?

ISAIAH 21

Three pictures help us better understand what is involved in faithful ministry.

The woman in travail (1–4). If you are faithful to your calling, your ministry will not be easy. Isaiah was distressed as he saw what God was doing in the world. He felt like a woman in travail (v. 3); it was very painful for him to “give birth” to his message.

The threshing floor (10). Why would Isaiah be distressed at the fall of the city of Babylon? (This was not the destruction of the city but a temporary takeover by a rival power.) Isaiah had hoped Babylon would stop the advances of Assyria and thus save the Jews from suffering. He saw them being winnowed and crushed by the enemy. He longed for a calm evening of his life (v. 4); instead, he had to carry distressing burdens to the end.

The watchman (5–9, 11–17). While the prophet was anxiously watching so he could warn the people, the nation’s leaders were carelessly feasting and thinking only of themselves (v. 5). The watchman sees both night (trouble) and morning (blessing), and that is how it will be until Jesus comes. The most important thing is that the watchman be faithful to warn when danger is coming (Ezek. 25:12–14).

“*Preaching that costs nothing accomplishes nothing.*”

John Henry Jowett

ISAIAH 22

Isaiah’s vision was probably of the Assyrian attack on Jerusalem (chaps. 36–37), and one of the messages of the chapter is this: when a crisis occurs, different people respond in different ways.

The prophet saw events from a spiritual viewpoint and was burdened (vv. 1–4). The city leaders depended on their defenses (vv. 8–11) and did not call for fasting and prayer. The people feasted and expected the worst. They had no faith in God (vv. 12–14; 1 Cor. 15:32).

Shebna used his office for personal gain (vv. 15–19), and the crisis brought him only shame. In taking inventory of the city’s resources, somebody uncovered his deceit and exposed

him. Instead of enjoying retirement, security, and a fine burial, he experienced captivity, exile, and a lonely death.

The crisis brought out the best in Eliakim (vv. 20–25). He was a servant who was a father to the people, a person who could be trusted with authority (the keys), and a strong peg on which the nation could put their burdens. He is the kind of leader needed today.

ISAIAH 23

Tyre and Sidon were Phoenician cities that brought great wealth to the nation by shipping and trading. It seemed incredible that such a successful economy would be wiped out, but it happened just as the prophet warned. Some of the people were stunned into silence (v. 2), while others openly expressed their grief by wailing (vv. 1, 6, 14). It seems that people who rarely weep over anything else will weep when they have money problems. The joy left the city (v. 7).

Assyria put Tyre and Sidon out of business for seventy years, and then they were restored.

God considered the business of Tyre and Sidon as nothing but fornication (v. 17; Rev. 17:1–2). They were harlots promoting themselves and ready to sell themselves at the highest price (v. 16). But some of their goods would be used to help rebuild the temple of the Lord (v. 18; Ezra 3:7).

Men may think they control the economy and what they do with their profits, but God makes the final decision.

ISAIAH 24

The whole earth is now the focus of attention and not just individual nations and cities. The Lord made the earth and is King over all the earth (Ps. 47:2), so He has a right to do what He pleases. He will punish sinners because they have not respected His covenant (v. 5; Gen. 9:8–17) or cared for the earth as faithful stewards of His gifts. They have disobeyed His will, claimed the earth for themselves, and abused it selfishly.

When that time of judgment comes, God will pay no attention to anyone's economic or social status (vv. 2–3). The joyful feast will become a funeral (vv. 7–13); those who try to escape will be trapped (vv. 17–18); and proud leaders will become pris-

oners (vv. 21–23). The Lord will humble the “haughty people” (v. 4) and the “exalted ones” (v. 21).

But Isaiah ends on a note of triumph: the Lord will reign gloriously (v. 23)! Will you be reigning with Him?

ISAIAH 25

The prophet now addresses God instead of the people and praises Him for who He is and what He has done. Isaiah’s knowledge of God’s truth did not make him proud; it humbled him and moved him to worship the Lord.

God is Judge (1–3, 10–12). “The city” ultimately refers to Babylon (Rev. 18:1–19:5), but it applies to anything man makes and uses to defy God. It does not take God long to wipe out a nation or destroy a city.

God is Refuge (4–5). Tribulation is like a storm, but He is the Refuge; it is like desert heat, but He is the Cloud that blots out the hot rays. God silences the noise of the enemy and brings peace.

God is Host (6–9). The Jews pictured the future kingdom as a great feast with God as the Host (Matt. 8:10–12; Rev. 19:6–9). But the feast will do more than sustain life; it will give life, for death will be destroyed forever (Rev. 20:11–15; 21:4).

Can you join the praise expressed in verse 9?

ISAIAH 26—27

The phrase “in that day” links these two chapters (26:1; 27:1, 2, 12, 13) and focuses attention on the glory of God in the promised kingdom (26:15). Knowing that the future is secure in the Lord is an encouragement when you suffer (Rom. 8:18–25; 2 Cor. 5:1–8).

Israel sings to the Lord (26). The proud enemy has been brought down (vv. 5–6), and God has given peace to His people (vv. 3, 12). The city of Jerusalem, where the Redeemer will reign, is strong and righteous after having been weak and defiled; and the nation’s time of tribulation will be ended. This is not something the Jews will do for themselves, for they will be like women in travail who give birth only to wind (vv. 16–18). God will do it, and His people will praise Him for His mercy.

The Lord sings about Israel (27:1–5). In chapter 5, God

sang about the failure of the vineyard, Israel. But here the theme is the fruitfulness of the nation and God's care over it. In that day, the enemy will be defeated (v. 1), and God will gather His people back to their land (vv. 12-13). From Israel, blessings shall flow to the whole world (v. 6).

The Peace of God

When you trust Jesus Christ to save you, your sins are forgiven (Col. 2:13), and you have peace with God (Rom. 5:1). He will never call you into judgment for them (John 5:24; Rom. 8:1). You may also enjoy "the peace of God" in your heart and mind as you pray (Phil. 4:6-7) and fix your mind on Him (Isa. 26:3; Phil. 4:8-9; Col. 3:1ff.). "The peace of God" is not the absence of problems; it is the presence of divine sufficiency in the midst of problems (Isa. 26:4; Phil. 4:13, 19). George Morrison said, "Peace is the possession of adequate resources"; and those resources come from the Lord when you yield heart and mind to Him.

ISAIAH 28

In verses 1-13, the prophet addressed the northern tribes (Ephraim) and indicted them for drunkenness (vv. 1-8) and an unteachable spirit (vv. 9-13). The religious leaders told Isaiah not to talk to them like children (vv. 9-10); after all, they knew the Law! But God would talk to them through the Assyrians whose tongue Israel would not understand. If God's people will not listen to His voice from the Word, they may have to listen to foreign voices that speak no peace and show no love.

It was a confident time in Israel, but their prosperity would fade like a trampled flower (vv. 1, 3-4), be carried away in a

storm and flood (v. 2), and be swallowed like fruit (v. 4). Judgment was at the gate (v. 6).

Then Isaiah denounced the sin of Judah (vv. 14–29), which was trusting false gods (vv. 14–15). Jesus Christ is God's Stone and He alone is a sure Refuge from the storm (Isa. 8:14; Matt. 21:42–44; Eph. 2:20). You have as much protection from lies as you do from a blanket that is too short! God is seeking a harvest and knows exactly how to handle the soil and the seeds (vv. 23–29). God's people may not enjoy the plowing and threshing, but the results are worth it.

ISAIAH 29

The prophet presented three descriptions of Ariel ("lion of God"), the city of Jerusalem.

A besieged city (1–8). The immediate reference is to God's victory over Assyria (Isa. 36–37), but the final application is to His defeat of the armies that will surround Jerusalem in the last days (Zech. 14:1–3). The enemy will be like dust and chaff. They will wake up and discover their dreams of success have become nightmares of defeat. God knows how and when to deliver His people.

A blind city (9–16). God's people were like drunken sleeping blind men trying to read a sealed book! They had no understanding of spiritual things nor did they worship God in the Spirit (Matt. 15:8–9). Even more, they made their own plans (political alliances) and thought God did not know (vv. 15–16)! Does the clay know more than the Potter (Rom. 9:20)? Can the thing made fool the Maker?

A blessed city (17–24). When the Lord returns and establishes His kingdom, things will change! God's people will hear and see His truth, rejoice in it, and honor the Holy One of Israel. But you need not wait to have Him change your life. Give Him an honest heart, and let the Potter have His way in your life.

ISAIAH 30—31

When Assyria threatened Judah, the leaders did not immediately turn to God for help but trusted in diplomacy. Their ambassadors went through dangerous territory (30:6–7) to go to Egypt, *but Egypt could not help Judah*. Egypt was as helpful

as a shadow (30:1-5), a wall about to fall down (30:12-13), or a broken clay vessel (30:14). The Egyptians were only men, not God (31:1-3). Are you trusting things that cannot help you while the Lord waits for you to come to Him for help (30:15, 18)?

Those who wait on the Lord for help will experience blessings, such as answered prayer (30:18-19), God's guidance (30:20-21), cleansing (30:22), fruitfulness (30:23-26), victory (30:27-33; 31:4-9), and a song (30:29).

The horses of Egypt can never take the place of the chariots of God (Ps. 20:7-8).

ISAIAH 32

Dependable people (1-2). Although our Lord fits this description (Isa. 25:4), the prophet is speaking primarily about leaders in the kingdom. They should be both *rocks* and *rivers*, providing *security* and *sufficiency*. Rocks do not move or change, while rivers are ever moving and changing. Leaders must be both consistent and adaptable, combining the faithfulness of the rock with the fruitfulness of the river.

Wise people (3-8). Fools, scoundrels, and schemers abounded in Isaiah's day and made the nation weak. But God wants people whose eyes, ears, and hearts are open to spiritual truth, people who are able to share that truth clearly with others.

Concerned people (9-15). Isaiah had a special burden for the careless women of the land (Isa. 3:16ff.; see also Amos 6:1ff.), for wives and mothers can have great influence for good or for evil. They were living at ease as God's judgment was about to fall. Their happy homes were about to be destroyed, but they did not seem to care.

Peaceful people (16-20). The prophet ends on a happy note, describing the peace and prosperity of the future kingdom. There can be no lasting peace without righteousness, and Jesus Christ is our "King of righteousness" and "King of peace" (Heb. 7:1-3).

ISAIAH 33

The prophet looked out at the horizon and saw the plunderer coming to conquer the land. Then he looked around at

some of the people in the nation who helped cause this judgment: the traitors who sold out to the enemy (v. 1); the ambassadors who sought help from Egypt (v. 7); and the religious hypocrites who pretended to serve God (v. 14; 1:10–20; 29:13). All of this was discouraging, but one thing encouraged Isaiah: a godly remnant that trusted the Lord and interceded for the land (vv. 2–4, 14–15). When you pray, you see the Lord exalted (vv. 5–6), you hear His words of encouragement (vv. 10–13), and you view your King in glory and power (vv. 17–24). Are you looking in the right direction? Are you a part of the godly remnant of intercessors?

◆

***It's a
Promise***

All the plunderers will be plundered, and all the traitors will themselves be betrayed (Isa. 33:1). We reap what we sow (Gal. 6:7–8).

◆

ISAIAH 34

From judgment upon His people, God turns to warn about judgment upon the whole world. It will be like slaughtering whole armies (v. 3), shaking heaven (v. 4), and sacrificing people like animals (vv. 5–7).

God will also judge the land (vv. 8–17) and make it a wilderness. When you read the judgments described in Revelation 6–19, you see what ruin will come to the earth. Isaiah specifically names Edom, one of Israel's longtime enemies; but no nation will escape.

Why this indignation? “For the cause of Zion” (v. 8). God fights *against* His people if they disobey Him, but He fights *for* them when His chastening has accomplished its purposes. He will keep His covenant with Abraham and Abraham's descendants (Gen. 12:1–3).

ISAIAH 35

Once again, God balances the announcement of judgment with the assurance of glory. He wants sinners to repent and

believers to be encouraged. When Jesus Christ comes to reign, marvelous changes will take place.

The desolate wilderness will become a beautiful garden (vv. 1-2, 7). Human history began in a garden, but man's sin turned the garden into a desert. God's creation will rejoice when it is set free from the bondage of sin (Isa. 55:12-13; Rom. 8:18-25).

The weak will be strong, and the disabled will be handicapped no longer (vv. 3-6). The wanderers will never lose their way as they walk safely on God's Highway of Holiness (vv. 8-9), and the weepers will have their sorrows turned into joy (v. 10).

As you wait for these physical blessings, you can enjoy them in a spiritual way. God can give you deliverance, fruitfulness, strength, holiness, and joy as you yield to Him.

"O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing"

Hear Him, ye deaf;

His praise, ye dumb, Your loosened tongues employ;

Ye blind, behold your Saviour come;

And leap, ye lame, for joy!

Charles Wesley

The Desert Will Bloom

Eighty-nine workers were accidentally killed during the building of Boulder (Hoover) Dam. The memorial plaque reads: "For those who died that the desert might bloom." One day, the desert will bloom to the glory of God because Jesus Christ died on the cross for the sins of the world.

ISAIAH 36

Chapters 36–39 are historical and describe three special tests that King Hezekiah faced: enemy invasion (chaps. 36–37), sickness (chap. 38), and flattery (chap. 39). See 2 Kings 18–19 and 2 Chronicles 32 for additional data.

The prophet warned that the Assyrian army was coming, and now it surrounded Jerusalem.

Assyria conquered Israel and then moved into Judah where it captured every fortified city. From the words of the Rabshakeh (army field commander), you can learn much about warfare against your own spiritual enemy, the devil.

Satan is proud and confident of victory. He tries to frighten you into surrendering. He knows that the most important thing is *where you put your faith* (v. 4). Are you trusting the world, yourself or the Lord (vv. 6–7)?

The enemy offers to give you something in return for your obedience (vv. 8, 16), *but there is always an “until” involved* (v. 17)! He wants you to think that his gifts are as good as the Lord’s gifts and that the Lord cannot be trusted to help you (vv. 14–15, 18).

Use the shield of faith to quench those fiery darts (Eph. 6:16) *and never negotiate with Satan* (v. 21). Do what Hezekiah did: ask the Lord for help and believe His Word.

ISAIAH 37

Not all victories are as dramatic as this one, but Hezekiah’s experience shows you what to do when you are attacked by the enemy.

Take your burdens to the Lord. It is good to talk things over with others, but only the Lord can work in your heart and turn fear into faith. God knows everything the enemy says and writes, and He has a perfect plan. By faith, take everything to Him in prayer.

Listen for God’s message. The words of the enemy will discourage you, but God’s Word will encourage you. In every battle, His word to you is, “Do not be afraid” (v. 6). After all, He has everything under control.

Seek to glorify God alone. More than anything else, Hezekiah was concerned for the glory of God (vv. 4, 16–20). “Hallowed be Thy name” must be your primary prayer.

Trust God to work. Sennacherib defied the God of Israel, and yet he died in the house of his god *who could not protect him*. God can handle the enemy far better than you can.

Trust God after the victory. The Assyrians had devastated the land, but God promised to feed His people and give them a harvest. Your future is in God's hands.

“The future is as bright as the promises of God.”

William Carey

ISAIAH 38

In the prime of life (v. 10), Hezekiah contracted a boil (v. 21) that so infected his body that he was told he would die (v. 1). All this happened before the events of chapters 36 and 37 (v. 6), but Hezekiah knew Assyria was coming. What a predicament to be in!

The king's prayer was certainly a normal response. After all, most believers want to go on living and serving God. He was concerned, too, about the future of the nation in view of the Assyrian advance. At any rate, God not only answered his prayer but even gave him a special sign to encourage his faith.

**“If you are swept off your feet, it is time to get
on your knees.”**

Frederick Beck

Hezekiah pictured death as going through a gate (v. 10), taking down a tent (v. 12), being cut from a loom and rolled up (v. 12), and being attacked by a beast (v. 13). But he clung to the Word of God (v. 17) and gave praise to God for all He did (vv. 16–20).

Difficult experiences should give us a new appreciation for life and a new desire to live for the Lord.

ISAIAH 39

This was the third test (2 Chron. 32:31), and the king failed miserably. What could not be accomplished through an army or an illness was accomplished through flattery. If Satan cannot succeed as a lion, then he comes as a serpent: "Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful" (Prov. 27:6).

The kisses. The king of Babylon wanted one thing: Judah's cooperation in opposing the Assyrians. The enemy is a liar and uses every excuse to get entry into your life. It was foolish for Hezekiah to welcome them and show them the royal treasures, but pride took over and discernment disappeared. Ephesians 4:17-32 lists some "footholds" you can give Satan in your life.

The wounds. Isaiah did not fear the king but told him truthfully that Babylon was the real enemy *and one day would conquer Judah*. However, instead of repenting, Hezekiah felt relieved that the judgment would not come in his day. How shortsighted can a man of faith become! Had he no concern for the future of his people?

Wound with Truth

It is not always easy to deliver God's message to those who need it. It takes courage to wound a friend. Nathan faced King David with the truth (2 Sam. 12), and Isaiah confronted both Ahaz (Isa. 7) and Hezekiah (Isa. 39). The apostle Paul fearlessly confronted Peter (Gal. 2:11ff.). One writer observed, "A lying tongue hates those who are crushed by it, and a flattering mouth works ruin" (Prov. 26:28). Speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15) and give wounds that heal.

ISAIAH 40

Voices (1–11). Though Isaiah wrote a century before the fall of Judah, his words greatly encouraged the exiles when they read them in Babylon. The voice of *comfort* (vv. 1–5) tells you that God knows how to measure your chastening and that He forgives and gives you a new beginning. The voice of *confidence* (vv. 6–8) assures you that His Word stands in spite of the frailty of man. The voice of *conquest* (vv. 9–11) is *your* voice as you share the good news with others. Shout it aloud!

Vision (12–24). Returning to the land and rebuilding the nation seemed impossible tasks to the exiles, so Isaiah invited them to behold the greatness of God. God is greater than every burden you bear and every challenge you face. Babylon was but a drop in the bucket to God! The world's false gods can do nothing to hinder the working of your great God, so trust Him to see you through.

Victory (25–31). You may be weak like grass (vv. 6–8), sheep (v. 11), dust (v. 15), grasshoppers (v. 22), and even worms (41:14); but if you trust the power of God, you can be like an eagle, a runner, and a patient pilgrim (vv. 28–31). In the emergencies of life, God helps you soar; in the daily routine of life, He helps you patiently walk. Both are the working of His mighty power (Eph. 3:20–21).

Servanthood

"Servant" is a key concept in the second half of Isaiah's prophecy. It refers to the nation of Israel (41:8–9); to Cyrus, king of Persia, who defeated Babylon (41:2; 44:28–45:1); and to the Lord Jesus Christ, God's "Suffering Servant," who died for the sins of the world (52:13–53:12).

ISAIAH 41

As the exiles prepared to return to their land, they looked around, saw other nations, and were afraid (vv. 1–7). But God

was (and is) in control of the nations, and He raised up Cyrus to do His bidding (vv. 2, 25). The false gods of the nations are no match for the true God of Israel.

Then the exiles looked at one another and asked, "Are we able to travel to our land and rebuild our nation?" (vv. 8–20). But God gave them assurance: "You are My servant! Fear not, for I am with you! I will help you!" He can make a toothless worm into a sharp threshing instrument (v. 15)! He can transform the arid desert into a garden (vv. 17–20).

Finally, they looked ahead and wondered about the future (vv. 21–29). God knows the future (the idols do not!) and has everything under control, so there is no need to worry.

As you contemplate your situation and face an unknown future, are you trusting Him? God's promise is still "I will help you" (vv. 10, 13, 14), and He will keep it!

Fear Not

The admonition "fear not" is often repeated in Isaiah, backed up by various reasons why God's people need not be afraid. God is with us no matter what the circumstances, and He strengthens us and helps us no matter what the task (41:10). He holds us as He helps us (41:13–14). He will not forsake us because He made us and redeemed us, and we belong to Him (43:1, 5) He was with us before we were born, and He has a purpose for us to fulfill in this world today (44:2). How can we be afraid when God's words are sure and He is the Rock of our salvation (44:8)?

ISAIAH 42

God helped His Servant, Jesus Christ (1–13). Matthew 12:18–21 applies this to our Lord in His earthly ministry to the

needy. He was chosen by God and empowered by God, so He did not get discouraged and quit. Jesus Christ lived and served by faith, trusting His Father to meet His needs, and that is the way you must live today. His power is available to you.

God helped His servant, Israel (14–25). Weak as they were, the nation returned to the land after their years of captivity. They were spiritually blind and obstinate, but God led them and worked on their behalf.

God helps His servants today. When you belong to God's family, your Father is ready to forgive and restore you. Putting life back together again may appear impossible, but the Lord will work for you if you let Him. He can do new things (v. 9), guide you on new paths (v. 16), and give you a new song (v. 10).

ISAIAH 43

There is no reason to be afraid when you realize what God has done for you. He formed you (v. 1) and made you for Himself (v. 21) and for His glory (v. 7). When you trusted Jesus Christ, God redeemed you (v. 1) and blotted out all your sins (v. 25). He is “the LORD, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King” (v. 15). He loves you (v. 4) and knows your name (v. 1). What a privilege to belong to such a great and gracious God!

Even more, God promises to be with you (v. 5) and take you through the water and the fire (v. 2). At the Exodus, He took Israel through the Red Sea and defeated the Egyptian army (vv. 16–17). Perhaps the three Hebrew heroes claimed this promise when they faced the fiery furnace (Dan. 3).

In spite of all the ministry He shares with us, God does not get weary as we do (40:28); but we can weary Him with our empty religious ritual and our sins (vv. 22–24). You are precious in His sight (v. 4), so do not cheapen yourself by disobeying Him.

ISAIAH 44

The faithfulness of God (1–8). Once again, God reminds His people that He formed them, chose them, and would help them. There is no need to be afraid, for God meets every need

(vv. 2-5) and keeps every promise (vv. 6-8). He knows what lies ahead and helps you prepare yourself to meet it.

The folly of idolatry (9-20). Israel learned in Babylon the futility and folly of idolatry. How easy it is to trust something other than the Lord, including the things we manufacture. Those who trust false gods will be afraid (v. 11) and become like the gods they worship (v. 18; Ps. 115:1-8). Their bodies may feast on excellent food (v. 19), but their souls feed on ashes (v. 20). They live on substitutes.

The future of Israel (21-28). Just like the exodus from Egypt (Exod. 14-15), the nation's exodus from Babylon would be a time of redemption and rejoicing, and God would confirm His Word to His people. Jerusalem would be restored and the temple rebuilt, and God would even use a pagan ruler to accomplish His purposes! He is the God of the impossible, so do what He commands.

Even a Pagan Ruler

The gods of the nations could not predict the future, but the Lord told Isaiah what would happen. A ruler named Cyrus would conquer Babylon and allow the Jews to return to their land (44:28; 45:1). Cyrus founded the Persian Empire, which defeated Babylon in 539 B.C. (Dan. 5:30). The next year, he issued the famous decree that permitted the Jews to go back to their land and rebuild their temple (Ezra 1:1-6). If God can use a pagan ruler to serve His people and fulfill His Word, you have no reason to be afraid of what people may say or do. The predictions of astrologers and other "prophets" are ashes. God's Word is the true light in the darkness (2 Pet. 1:19-21).

ISAIAH 45

God makes declarations to Cyrus (vv. 1-7), to the Jews (vv. 8-19), and to the gentile nations (vv. 20-25); and in these messages, He speaks to His people today.

His message to Cyrus was one of *sovereignty*, focusing on His uniqueness: Jehovah is the Creator and the Lord of history. Cyrus did not even know the Lord; yet the Lord called him by name and used him to accomplish His purposes. When life seems to be tumbling in, remember that God is on the throne and is sovereign.

Look Now!

*The famous British preacher Charles Had-
don Spurgeon (1834-92) was converted to
Christ when he heard a layman preach a
sermon based on Isaiah 45:22. "He was
an ignorant man," said Spurgeon in later
years. "He could not say much; he was
obliged to keep to his text. Thank God for
that." The preacher looked at young Spur-
geon and said, "Young man, you are very
miserable. Young man, look! In God's
name, look, and look now!" Spurgeon
said, "I did look, blessed be God! I know
I looked then and there, and he who but
that minute before had been near despair
had the fullness of joy and hope." Have
you looked to Christ by faith and received
His gift of salvation?"*

His message to Israel emphasized *submission*. God can tell the rain clouds what to do, but His own people resist Him. This is like the clay telling the potter what to do (Jer. 18) or the child scolding the parents. If Israel would trust Him, they could share in the great things He was doing. Cyrus would

cooperate with the Lord, and he did not even know Him!

The message to the Gentiles was one of *salvation*. God's purpose through Israel was that all nations be blessed (Gen. 12:1-3). One day God will gather His people and establish His kingdom, and then the nations will know the true God and trust the Savior. Meanwhile, we must get the message of salvation to every tribe and nation.

ISAIAH 46—47

The prophet speaks to the Babylonians and warns them that judgment is coming because of their many sins.

He begins with their idolatry (chap. 46) and contrasts Jehovah and the gods of Babylon. The idols must be carried, but Jehovah is a God who carries His people. The false gods cannot predict the future or control history, but Jehovah does both. The idols are all alike, but Jehovah is the only true God and there is none like Him. Rejoice that you can worship the true and living God (Ps. 115)!

There Is No Substitute

An idol is a substitute for God, something that we value and serve other than God. We trust it and sacrifice for it; but in the end, it can do us no good. Isaiah mocked the idols of the nations and affirmed repeatedly that Jehovah was the only true and living God (40:18-20; 41:5-7; 44:9-20; 45:15-21; 46:1-7). Martin Luther said that "all such as rely and depend upon their art, wisdom, strength, sanctity, riches, honor, power, or anything else" are guilty of worshiping idols.

God then accused them of being proud (47:1-3), having no humanity (47:4-7), living for pleasure (47:8-9), and depending

on occult practices (47:10-15), sins that are prevalent today. The "Lady of Kingdoms" would sit in the dust like a barren widow, and the astrologers and stargazers would be burned to stubble. Why did they not see the fire coming?

Nations and kingdoms have their day, but God reigns as King. Just be sure you are not learning the practices of Babylon.

ISAIAH 48

Rebuke. When you end up in trouble because you did not listen to sound advice, the last thing you want to hear is somebody saying, "I told you so!" But that is just what God says to Israel in this chapter. He had warned them that their sins would bring judgment, but they hardened their necks and closed their ears. It was time to repent and seek forgiveness.

Refining. The captivity was about to end. It had been a time of refining for the nation (v. 10; Job 23:10; 1 Pet. 1:7), but they had learned to turn from idols and trust Jehovah alone. If you resist, the fire will burn you and make you hard; if you submit, the fire will purify you and make you tender.

Renewing. God declares new things (Isa. 42:9) and does new things (Isa. 43:19), and His people can hear new things (v. 6). Verse 20 has its parallel in 2 Corinthians 6:14-18. As you obey God, He leads you (v. 17), gives you peace (v. 18), and meets your needs (v. 21). No matter how weak you are, you can lean on Him (v. 2).

ISAIAH 49

The Servant is the Lord Jesus Christ, to whom several meaningful names are given.

He is God's *weapon* to conquer the enemy (vv. 1-2; Heb. 4:12; Rev. 1:16; 19:15) and to bring salvation to the nations. He is God's *Israel* (v. 3), accomplishing what the nation failed to accomplish, namely, bringing God's salvation to the Gentiles.

He is a *light* (v. 6) to guide the Gentiles to God (Luke 1:79; Acts 13:47); and He is the *covenant of God* (v. 8), fulfilling all the promises God made to the fathers (Isa. 42:6; Rom. 15:8-13; 2 Cor. 1:20). The nation's return to the land was a picture of their final return when Messiah comes (vv. 8-13).

There are times when you wonder if God really cares about you (v. 14), but He assures you that you are not forgotten. You are His beloved child (v. 15; Ps. 27:10), and He will never forget your name (v. 16). He will gather His family and bring them home (vv. 19-23).

ISAIAH 50

The unfaithful wife (1-3). Israel was “married to Jehovah” when she accepted His covenant at Sinai. But the nation eventually turned to idols, committed spiritual adultery, and sold herself into slavery; and God had to put her away (Hos. 1-4). God will restore His chosen people one day just as He forgives and restores believers today who turn from sin and obey Him (James 4:1-10).

The faithful Servant (4-9). This is our Lord Jesus Christ with a ready-tongue and an open ear (vv. 4-5), a set face (v. 7; Luke 9:51), and a body surrendered to suffering (v. 6). What an example for us to follow as we seek to serve the Lord (Rom. 12:1-12).

The perplexed disciple (10-11). People who fear God and obey Him can still end up in the darkness of perplexity. Then they are tempted to light their own fires and try to find their way out by themselves. Instead, trust the Lord, wait on Him, and He will give you the light you need when you need it.

ISAIAH 51

As the nation prepared to leave Babylon and return home, they needed to strengthen their faith in Jehovah God. God told them to do the following:

Look back! God urged His people to recall their spiritual roots: the call of Abraham (vv. 1-2) and the exodus from Egypt (vv. 9-10, 15). They are a covenant people, and God will not break His promises. They are a redeemed people, and God will care for them. Take time to remember your spiritual roots; you will be encouraged in your faith.

Look up! He said, “Lift up your eyes” (v. 6; Gen. 15:1-6). Again, Isaiah tells the people to consider God’s creation and remember what a great God He is and how lasting is His Word (40:6-8, 12-14). When you are prone to fret, remember

that the Creator is your Father, and you have nothing to fear.

Look ahead! The wilderness will become a Garden of Eden (v. 3), and the people will “exodus” from Babylon and return joyfully to Zion (v. 11). The ultimate fulfillment will be when the kingdom is established and all of Israel’s enemies will be defeated.

ISAIAH 52

It is a new day and time for God’s people to *wake up* (v. 1; 51:9, 17; Rom. 13:11–14). The night of trial is over, and God will do a new thing for them. This is a new day for you, so wake up to God’s blessing (Lam. 3:22–23).

It is also time to *dress up* (v. 1), for the feast is about to begin. God has forgiven His people and brought them home, and it is time to rejoice (v. 9; Luke 15:22–24).

It is time to *speak up* (vv. 7–10) and tell the world what God has done for His people. Paul applies this to the sharing of the gospel with the lost (Rom. 10:15).

It is time to *clean up* (vv. 11–12). As the exiles left Babylon, they were not to defile themselves but be clean and carry the holy vessels back to Zion. There is always a new “Babylon” for God’s people to flee if they would keep themselves clean (Rev. 18:1–8). As you obey, God goes before you and behind you, so you need not be afraid of the enemy.

ISAIAH 53

This chapter is about Jesus Christ, God’s perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world (Acts 8:26–40). It actually begins in 52:13 where the prophet tells us that the Servant suffered for doing God’s will and yet was highly exalted by the Lord. Humiliation and exaltation, suffering and glory, are key themes in this prophecy.

Consider the humiliation of His birth and life (vv. 1–3) as well as the humiliation of His trial and His sufferings and death (vv. 4–9). Consider the glory of the salvation He purchased for you on the cross (vv. 10–12). The Father was pleased, not that His Son suffered, but that His sacrifice accomplished eternal salvation. God’s justice was satisfied, and believing sinners can be justified (v. 11; Rom. 3:21–31).

Consider the pictures of the Savior: a beaten servant (52:13-14), a root (53:2), an innocent lamb (53:7), an offering for sin (53:10), a woman in travail giving birth to spiritual "seed" (53:10-11), and a victorious general (53:12). Hallelujah, what a Savior!

Yet people still do not believe in Him (v. 1). Instead, they despise and reject Him (v. 2) and laugh at the message of the Cross (1 Cor. 1:18-25). But heaven praises the Lamb of God (Rev. 5), and His people on earth glory in His cross (Gal. 6:14). Are you among them?

He Paid the Price

Isaiah 53 is cited or alluded to frequently in the New Testament. (Along with the passages in the Gospels that describe Christ's sufferings, death, and burial, see John 1:29; 12:38; Acts 8:26-40; Rom. 10:16; Heb. 9:28; 1 Pet. 2:21-25; Rev. 5.) The chapter teaches substitutionary atonement, that the innocent Son of God died in the place of guilty sinners and paid the price for sin. We do not understand all that was involved in that "holy transaction" on the cross, but we do know that it accomplished salvation for a lost world.

ISAIAH 54

The future regathering and restoring of Israel is a picture of the wonderful changes God makes when trials and sufferings end.

The barren woman gives birth to so many children that the family tent must be enlarged (vv. 1-3). The widow loses her shame and is wed once again, this time to Jehovah (vv. 4-6). The storm is over and God gives peace (vv. 7-15), and the covenant sign of the rainbow is in the sky (v. 10).

Times of chastening or suffering may seem spiritually barren to you, but God uses them to give birth to blessings. Times of sorrow and reproach are painful, but they can lead to greater joys. Storms are frightening, but they polish God's jewels (vv. 11-12) and bring Him glory. It is painful to go through the furnace (vv. 16-17), but God uses the experience to make you a stronger and better tool.

The best is yet to come!

*“We say, ‘sorrow, disaster, calamity’; God says, ‘chastening,’ and it sounds sweet to Him though it is a discord to our ears. Don’t faint when you are rebuked, and don’t despise the chastenings of the Lord.
‘In your patience possess ye your souls.’”*

Oswald Chambers

ISAIAH 55

Again, the prophet depicts the changes God makes in the lives of those who turn from their sins and trust the Savior.

From substitutes to reality (1-2). The lost sinner is bankrupt because he spends all he has for what cannot satisfy. When you hear God's Word and obey, you start to enjoy the water of life and the bread of life, found in Jesus Christ (John 4; 6).

From death to life (3-5). Compare verse 3 with John 5:24. Jesus is the fulfillment of the covenant God made with David (2 Sam. 7; Acts 13:34). When you trust Him, you share in His life and His victories.

From guilt to pardon (6-7). When the sinner repents and turns to Christ by faith, God shows mercy and grants pardon. But do not delay (Prov. 1:20-33)!

From fear to certainty (8-11). God's ways are beyond man's comprehension, but you can be sure He is accomplishing His purposes in His times. Like the rain and snow that seem to be wasted, God's Word accomplishes His will on the earth.

From wilderness to paradise (12–13). Sin turns the garden into a desert (Isa. 5:3–6; 32:12–15), but grace transforms the desert into a joyful and fruitful garden. Abundant satisfaction, pardon, and joy are available to all who accept God’s gracious invitation.

ISAIAH 56

It was God’s purpose that through Israel the Gentiles might come to know the true God and His salvation (Gen. 12:1–3). But instead, Israel adopted the false gods of the Gentiles! Their leaders were like blind watchmen, greedy watchdogs that could not bark, and shepherds concerned only for themselves (vv. 9–12). No wonder the nation went into captivity! And what a warning to spiritual leaders today!

But God did not abandon the Gentiles. The “outcast” foreigner is accepted (vv. 6–8), and the eunuch is welcomed (vv. 3–5; Deut. 23:1). In Jesus Christ, the wall between Jews and Gentiles is broken down; and any sinner can come to the Savior and find forgiveness and acceptance (Eph. 2).

Jesus quoted from verse 7 when He cleansed the temple in Jerusalem (Matt. 21:13). How tragic that the religious leaders had turned a place of worship and witness into a den of thieves. Would any Gentile want to know the God of Israel after seeing the Court of the Gentiles made into a marketplace? But what do outsiders see when they attend our church services today (1 Cor. 14:23–25)?

ISAIAH 57

Deterioration (1–2). When God wants to judge His people, He sometimes takes the godly leaders away; and they are spared the pain of seeing their nation deteriorate and then go into judgment (vv. 1–2; 3:1–5). Do you appreciate the men and women God has given to provide spiritual leadership, and do you encourage them?

Denunciation (3–13). This description of the godless society in Judah seems quite contemporary. God denounced them for lying, worshiping idols, indulging in sexual sins, sacrificing their children, and mocking the godly. These people had no fear of God because He did not immediately send judgment, but their day was coming.

Dedication (14–21). Even in a godless society, here and there are dedicated people who have fellowship with God. God longs to dwell with His people (John 14:21–24), and He will if they are humble and contrite (Ps. 51:17; Isa. 66:2). Does God “feel at home” in your heart (Eph. 3:14–21)?

ISAIAH 58

When you strive to be a spiritual person, you fight the constant battle of “ritual versus reality.” It is much easier to go through the external activities of religion than it is to love God from your heart and let that love touch the lives of others. It is a matter not of either/or but of both/and: worshiping God from the heart and serving others in love. James stated, “Faith without works is dead” (2:20).

The orthodox faith was popular in Judah at that time, and people enjoyed learning the Word and even participating in fasts (vv. 2–3). But when the services were over, the worshipers went back to exploiting people and pleasing themselves.

What a difference it makes when we repent and return to the Lord (vv. 8–12)! We have light instead of darkness, healing instead of disease, righteousness instead of defilement, glory instead of disgrace; and life becomes a watered garden, not a dismal swamp.

ISAIAH 59

The images in this chapter teach important spiritual truths.

Hands (1–3). God’s hand is unable to work when our hands are defiled with sin. Our prayers accomplish nothing (Ps. 66:18), and His power is absent from our lives and ministries.

Poison (4–5). A lie is not just a sound in the air or a sentence on paper. It has a life of its own and gives birth to all kinds of trouble. Try to live on lies, and they will poison you. When lies finally “hatch,” they will bite you and may kill you (James 1:13–16).

Spiders’ webs (6–8). Trying to hide behind lies and hypocritical religious works is like clothing yourself with a spider’s web. The sins described here were committed by *religious* people. No wonder God withheld His blessings! Is He doing that today?

Traffic jam (9–15). It is dark. The pedestrians on the streets are blind and are acting like beasts. Truth has fallen in the street and progress has ceased. The “traffic officers” (justice and righteousness) are standing far off because the people will not let them exercise authority.

Manhunt (16–21). God searched for one person to intercede for His people, but He found none, so He did the work Himself. Are you an intercessor? Are you concerned about the “traffic jam” that hinders God’s work and robs God of glory?

*“God will bless Elijah and send rain on Israel, but
Elijah must pray for it. If the chosen nation is to
prosper, Samuel must plead for it. If the Jews are to be
delivered, Daniel must intercede. God will bless Paul,
and the nations shall be converted, but Paul must
pray. . . . Let me have your prayers, and I can do
anything! Let me be without my people’s prayers,
and I can do nothing!”*

Charles Haddon Spurgeon

ISAIAH 60

Light (1–3, 19–22; Rev. 21–22). As Isaiah looked ahead to the redeemed people and the restored city of Zion, the thing that impressed him most was *glory* (vv. 1, 2, 7, 9, 13, 19, 21). It would be the dawning of a new day for the nation. Ponder John 17:22–24; Romans 8:18; and 1 Peter 5:10.

Unity (4–9). The nations will stream to the light of Israel, and Jews and Gentiles will unite in worshiping and serving God. Our world is plagued by division and conflict, but one day God will give peace.

Joy (10–18). God’s favor and mercy will enrich His people as He surrounds them with beauty and joy. Zion’s citizens will know the Lord and give Him praise.

ISAIAH 61

Release (1-3). Jesus took these verses as His text when He preached in Nazareth (Luke 4:16ff.) and announced that He was ushering in the Year of Jubilee (Lev. 25). It is a time of releasing the slaves, canceling all debts, and making a new beginning. Today, those who trust Christ begin to enjoy their Jubilee; those who reject Him face judgment.

Renewal (4-6). The land of Judah was in ruins after the Babylonian captivity, but God would help the people repair and rebuild. The whole nation would become priests of the Lord (1 Pet. 2:5, 9) and servants of God.

Rejoicing (7-11). Instead of shame, there would be rejoicing and everlasting joy. It would be like going from a funeral to a wedding (Luke 5:27-39) and from a desert to a beautiful garden!

Have you entered your Jubilee?

ISAIAH 62

God's promises should become our prayers. Isaiah prayed that Jerusalem might be restored (v. 1), and he urged the watchmen and all of God's people to pray as well (vv. 6-7). The psalmist also prayed "for the peace of Jerusalem" (Ps. 122:6). When there is peace in Jerusalem, there will be peace in the world.

The nation's restoration will be as joyful as a wedding (vv. 4-5; 61:10). *Beulah* means "married," and *Hephzibah* means "My delight is in her." The people were "divorced" from God because of their unfaithfulness, and He was not delighted in them; but that will change when God cleanses their sins.

Now is the time to make ready, for the King is coming to Zion (vv. 10-12; Matt. 21:5; Rev. 22:12)!

ISAIAH 63

Indignation (1-6). When Jesus Christ returns to establish His kingdom, He will come as a conquering warrior (Rev. 19:11-21). When He came the first time, He was a servant who shed His blood for sinners; but the next time, the sinners will shed their blood in a futile defense against the Lord. The Year of Jubilee will become the "day of vengeance" (Isa. 61:1-2).

Compassion (7-14). Jesus will defeat His enemies, but He will save His own people (v. 8). The emphasis is on loving-kindness, goodness, mercy, and love. God cares for His children and promises them glory (1 Thess. 5:9-10). Just as He saved them in the days of Moses, so He will save them in the latter days.

Intercession (15-19). Isaiah continues to pray for his people (62:1). As a child pleading with a father, he begs God to return and overcome the enemy. He longs to see the temple restored and the people obeying their Lord. Have you joined in that prayer?

Are Your Trials Overwhelming?

Isaiah said, "In all their affliction He was afflicted" (63:9). God not only goes with you in the difficulties of life (Isa. 43:2), but He knows how you feel. Your High Priest in heaven is able to sympathize with you because He has experienced the trials and temptations of life (Heb. 2:17-18; 4:14-16). You should cast "all your care upon Him, for He cares for you" (1 Pet. 5:7).

ISAIAH 64

The missing demonstration (1-4). When the enemy attacked Jerusalem, the Lord held His peace and did not intervene. The Jews were both defeated and disgraced before their foes. Is this somewhat parallel to the situation of God's people today? Demonstrations of divine power are easily found in history books but not readily found among God's people today. Why?

The missing intercession (5-7). Isaiah once again emphasizes the importance of prayer (62:1, 6-7; 63:15-19). God wonders that there is no intercessor (Isa. 59:16), nobody who will get stirred up about the need for confessing sin and seeking

God's face. Until we pray and get right with God, He will not reveal His power (2 Chron. 7:14).

The missing submission (8-12). The clay should yield to the Potter, and the children should obey the Father (Isa. 29:16; 45:9-10; Jer. 18; Rom. 9:20-21). No wonder the temple, the city, and the land were desolate, for God cannot bless those who rebel against Him. If God is going to "come down" with His power, we must fall down in surrender to Him.

Riches Beyond Compare

Paul quoted Isaiah 64:4 in 1 Corinthians 2:9. Some people think this refers to heaven, but Paul applied it to the Christian life here and now (1 Cor. 2:10). When you read the Word of God and let the Spirit teach you, you can find out the wonderful things God has done for you and will do for you as you trust and obey. Your Bible is your "passbook" to the Bank of Heaven; it tells you how rich you are in Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:3, 7, 18; 2:7; 3:8, 16).

ISAIAH 65

The rebels (1-7). God pleaded with His people to turn from their sins and come back to Him, but they refused. They acted so pious and yet were guilty of many sins: worshiping idols, following occult practices, violating dietary laws, and blaspheming God. But if the Jews rejected God's call, the Gentiles responded in their stead (Rom. 10:20-21; Matt. 21:43).

The remnant (8-16). God always has His faithful remnant, like a few grapes after the harvest (Deut. 24:21); and He uses them as the nucleus of a new beginning. The rebels will be judged, but the remnant ("My servants") will be blessed.

The regeneration (17-25). That is what Jesus called the kingdom God has prepared for His people (Matt. 19:28). The

blessings named are in contrast to the judgments listed in Deuteronomy 28:15ff. It will be a time of joy and fulfillment when the blessing of the Lord flows without interference from man.

“We should all be concerned about the future because we will have to spend the rest of our lives there.”

Charles F. Kettering

ISAIAH 66

Trembling (1-6). How can anyone build a house for the Lord when He made everything (Isa. 40:25-26)? He is so great that He uses the earth for His footstool (v. 1)! But with all of His greatness, God deigns to dwell with the humble (v. 2; 57:15), those who tremble at His word and seek to glorify Him (v. 5).

Tremble at His Word

To “tremble at God’s word” (Isa. 66:2, 5) means to respect what God says and fear to disobey it (Ps. 119:120). The Jews experienced this when Ezra exposed their sins (Ezra 9:4; 10:3), and the prophet Habakkuk experienced it when he saw the vision of God’s judgment (Hab. 3:16). Saul of Tarsus trembled when he met the Lord (Acts 9:6). However, King Jehoiakim did not tremble at the Word; he tried to destroy it (Jer. 36), and that led to his destruction (Prov. 13:13). Paul urged, “Work out your own salvation [Christian life] with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12).

Travailing (7-13). The restoration of Israel's kingdom will be as sudden and joyful as the birth of a baby. The travail of their tribulation will give birth to glory, and God will love them just like a mother (v. 13). It will be a time of peace and joy.

Triumphing (14-24). God will defeat His enemies (vv. 14-17), summon the gentile nations to share the glory (vv. 18-19), and make Israel a holy offering to the Lord (vv. 20-24). Isaiah opened his prophecy indicting Israel for her religious hypocrisy (chap. 1), but he ended it promising that her worship will be acceptable to the Lord.